

TENNYSON

HIS ART AND
RELATION TO
MODERN LIFE

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TENNYSON

HIS ART AND RELATION TO MODERN LIFE

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

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CHAPTER X

IDYLLS OF THE KING

IN the *Idylls of the King* Tennyson has worked up into a whole the ancient story of Arthur, a story which is at least a thousand years old. How it first arose none can tell. Whether it has any historical basis, it is also impossible to decide. It is supposed that there was an historical Arthur who fought twelve great battles with the English heathen, and who had many hero-chieftains under his sway and in his devotion, but the more we look at him the more his figure recedes into the mist of legend or of myth. Even the country where he reigned, and the lands over which his wars were waged, are not known to us. Some scholars make him a warrior of Southern Britain. Others place him in the North, beyond the Border, and he fights with the Saxon chiefs from Dumbarton to the eastern coast, beating them back in twelve great battles. Out of the dim vapour of ancients these two great figures rise, and the name of Arthur alone mingles them into one. Tennyson takes the first tradition, and it is the one that has the most prevailed in literature.

It is not, however, with an historical, but with a mythical Arthur that we have to deal, and we

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need not be forced to surrender the wild island of Tintagil, the mystic expanse of Lyonesse, the rock of Glastonbury rising from its marshes, and the lovely meadows round Caerleon upon Usk. *There* is our romantic country; there the legendary land where Arthur was born; there the valley of Avalon where he took refuge when wounded to the death. There is not one touch of the real world in all the scenery that Tennyson invents in his poem. It belongs throughout to that country which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, but which the heart of man has imagined. It is more than invented landscape. It often breathes the atmosphere of the fairy lands, and of those dreams which open the spaceless realms beyond our senses. It seems to be born before the sight and then to die and be born in another form—changing, yet unchanged. No mortal hands have built the city of Arthur and his palace. It is no land dwelt in by bold bad men we see, when Arthur rides through the mountains and finds the diamonds; when Geraint and Enid go through the green gloom of the wood; when Galahad rides over the black swamp, leaping from bridge to bridge till he sail to the spiritual city; when Lancelot drives through the storm to the enchanted towers of Carbonek seven days across the sea. Nor is the Nature actual Nature, but that which is seen

From magic casements ¹opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn ,

And when we can disburden ourselves of the ethics and allegory, the personages are still as dreamlike as the landscape, old as the seas that roll over

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Lyonnesse, and yet young for ever in imagination. In our everyday world the Arthur and Guinevere of Romance, Lancelot and the Lady of the Lake, Gawain and Galahad, Percivale and Elaine are unreal shapes; yet how real they are in a better world! The interests of the world we call real fade and die, our children will not care for them; for half of them, for those that are not founded on love, we do not care ourselves; but the interests of romance are eternal. They blossom into a new spring year by year, and we take more thought for the fates of Lancelot and Guinevere than we do for what the Swede intends or what the French. For "fable is Love's world," and the great myths and their figures are the dear inhabitants of the heart of man. Centuries have been stirred and thrilled by Arthur and his knights. England, France, Germany, and Italy have awakened into creation at their Celtic touch; and poetry, painting, sculpture, and music have replied to their enchantment. From Cornwall or the North the story got to Wales; from Wales it fled to Brittany. From Brittany it returned to Wales and crossed the March into England in the *Brut* of Layamon, the first English poem of the imagination after the Conquest. But before that time, it had got from Brittany into France, and from France in French to England, where prose tales in Latin and poems in English and in Norman French sent it far and wide. Chaucer owned its power; Malory embodied it; Spenser seized it; Milton thought of it as an epic; Dryden considered it; Wordsworth touched it; Tennyson took up its lyre again; Morris and Swinburne and Arnold entered into its

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enchanted land. But it was characteristic of Tennyson's steadiness of temper and fulness of thought that he should try to make his form of it complete and new-created. At first, it moved him only as romance, and we have seen how his youth played with it in the *The Lady of Shalott*, in *Sir Galahad*, and in the ride of Lancelot and Guinevere through woods of love and spring. Then in the *Morte d'Arthur* the story was fitted in 1842 by certain modern touches to modern life, yet these had to be explained by the Prologue and Epilogue. In that poem itself the tale was chief; it follows the old romance and breathes its air.

In 1842, when the *Morte d'Arthur* appeared, Tennyson does not seem to have thought of making the story allegorical. I do not even think that when the first four *Idylls* were published—*Geraint and Enid*; *Merlin and Vivien*; *Lancelot and Elaine*; and *Guinevere*—Tennyson wrote them with a set allegorical intention. They are only modernised by being made a representation of true love and false love. Vivien the harlot is set over against the tender innocence of Elaine. Enid, the true wife, is opposed to Guinevere who has been untrue. The men also represent different phases of love as modern as they are ancient. Geraint and Merlin, Lancelot and Arthur, have each their distinct lesson—beyond the story—to modern life. They have not yet become allegorical, and even the lesson, the ethical aim, is as yet subordinate to the story. True conduct, as is just in art, is indirectly, not directly taught.

But when we come to 1870—to the volume which began with *The Coming of Arthur*—the inner

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intention of the whole poem seems to be changed. The making of a kind of epic out of the story of Arthur, which should have an instructive but indirect relation to the moral needs of society and the individual, is placed upon the second plane. The poem is now an allegory of the soul of man warring with sense, and passing on its way through life to death, and through death to resurrection. The great rulers of the kingdom of human nature—the intellect, the conscience, the will, the imagination, the divine spirit in man, are shadowed forth in mystic personages. The historic powers which stand outside the soul and help it to reign and work—the Church, the Law, the great Graces of God—are also embodied. Moreover, the various conditions of human nature in its growth from brutality to an ordered kingdom, that which saves or loses true life, the general desires and tendencies of man, the temptations which beset him, the wise and unwise views of the goal of life, the love which saves, the love which ruins, the religious passion which leads aright and that which leads astray, are symbolised before us in a number of other personages, episodes and events invented by Tennyson for the sake of his allegory.

The Coming of Arthur shows this conception fully orb'd in the mind of Tennyson. Arthur is the rational soul, not the son of Uther and Ygerne, but coming mysteriously from heaven and washed into Merlin's arms by a great wave. Merlin, who educates him, is intellectual power, with all the magic of science. Arthur's kingship is opposed by the brutal and sensual powers in human nature, but the soul beats them down, and lets in light and justice over

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the waste places of human nature where the ape, the tiger and the bandit lurk. Guinevere is the heart, and all we mean by the term. The soul, to do its work, must be knit to the heart in noble marriage—Arthur must be wed to Guinevere. The Knights of the Round Table are the high faculties in man whom the soul builds into order round it, to do its just and reforming will. When the King is crowned and married the three great fairies that stand by are Faith, Hope and Charity; and the Lady of the Lake, "clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful," who gives the soul Excalibur—the sword of the Spirit—with which to do his war-work against base sense, appetite, and their disordered tyranny, is the Church. In embodying these conceptions, every word, every adjective, every description is weighed by Tennyson. The symbolism is extended into the remotest recesses of the tale. The allegory is thus fully launched in *The Coming of Arthur*, and the *Idylls* that were published with it, and that followed it, were written to the allegory. Even those that preceded it appear to have been somewhat modified to suit its requirements.

The question now arises, Of what kind was this allegory of Tennyson's and how did he manage it? It differed from the allegories that preceded it. The great mediæval allegory, *The Romance of the Rose* (the type of all allegory in the Middle Ages), was nothing but an allegory. There was no story connected with it which was independent of the allegory. The series of events and adventures which brought the knight at last to the enjoyment of the Rose were allegorically invented, and each of

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them had its meaning. The story was obscure and the allegory was plain. But in Tennyson's poem the story existed already; it was independent of the allegory, and it forms an important part of the poem. Neither is the allegory plain, it is hidden beneath the story.

Our next great allegory is *The Faerie Queene*. That is also plainly allegorical. The names make the meaning clear. The Red Cross Knight, Una, Duessa, Orgoglio, the Dragon, all tell their tale. But there is much more of a story in this first book of *The Faerie Queene* (and I speak of the first book alone, for it is the only one which has a clear unity) than there is in *The Romance of the Rose*. We are nearly as much interested in the knight, in Una, and in many of the minor characters, as we might be if they were real personages, and not images of truth and purity, of pride and falsehood and hypocrisy. But in Tennyson's poem the story is often greater than the allegory; it still breathes, and moves, and interests those to whom allegory is a weariness. At other times the story is of equal weight with the allegory, and we can ignore the allegory if it please us to do so. This separates altogether the *Idylls of the King* from *The Faerie Queene*. Moreover, the names are not allegorical. We have to search for a hidden, not to follow a plain allegory. Spenser invented a story to suit his conception; Tennyson took an old tale and inserted his conception into it. But he was forced by his allegorical end to frequently invent as well, and his inventions, though they are often of the finest quality (as in *The Holy Grail*), confuse our interest

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in the story as much as the story confuses their meaning. The allegory and the tale do not fit throughout. They clash and trouble one another. An allegory, to be right in art, ought to have a story entirely invented for its purpose.

The next great allegory with which we may compare that of Tennyson is the first book of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This is the finest allegory in the English language—the ideal art-thing. It proclaims itself an allegory by the names. The city of Vanity Fair, the Delectable Mountains, tell what they are; and yet these places seem as real as London and the Surrey hills. Christian and Pliable, Faithful and the Old Adam, Wanton and Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Great-Heart and Giant Despair, tell also who and what they are; and yet they are all alive, they talk like living beings; we have met them in life—yesterday in the streets; they awaken the keenest human interest.

It is this combination of reality and allegory, of story and symbol, each of them clear, vivid, and human, and both going straight home to the experiences of the soul, which lifts *The Pilgrim's Progress* into the highest place. The story and the allegory are of almost equal weight in the imagination. The inherent fault of an allegory—want of human interest—has been overcome without any loss of the allegorical interest. This is a real triumph. Nobody else but Dante has done it, and his way was only partly allegorical. Tennyson has not done it. His poem is not plainly an allegory, nor is it plainly a story. Sometimes the men and the women are real, sometimes they are mere shadows. Sometimes the events are human and romantic,

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sometimes they are metaphysical, theological ideas in a romantic dress. We glide from reality to vision and from vision to reality. The two things are not amalgamated. In fact, the allegory might as well have been left out altogether, and this statement, if it be true, condemns the allegory in the *Idylls of the King*. Nevertheless, there is something more to be said. Bunyan reached his perfection of work in this kind of literature by natural *naïveté*, by the unconsciousness and the faith of a childlike imagination. Tennyson reached what excellence he did reach in this matter by sheer dint of intellect. Few things have given me so high an idea of Tennyson's intellectual power as separate from his imagination, as his fitting in of the allegorical conceptions into the body of the story. He does not succeed in doing it well, because it was not in art to do it well; but the efforts his intellect makes to do it, and the comparative success he attained, are proof of great intellectual power. They are failures, but they are gigantic struggles for success.

It is almost a pity that he made these efforts at all. They confuse his ethical ends, and they were not needed to attain those ends. All he wanted to teach he could have taught and does teach through the acts of the men and women of the story. The repentance of Guinevere and the forgiveness of Arthur are far more impressive, and far simpler in their lesson to life, when we see Arthur as Arthur, and Guinevere as Guinevere, than when we see Arthur as the rational soul, and Guinevere as the heart, in human nature. Moreover, they are not only needless and confusing

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efforts, they are also not good art. They are apart from the true realm of poetry. We are conscious that in working them out and weaving them in, elaborate thinking has taken the place of creative emotion; that art has partly abdicated her throne to the understanding. Whenever the allegory is mingled up with the story, the poetry is disturbed, the tale is weak, and we are a little wearied. This is not the case when the story is all allegorical, when it is invented by Tennyson for the allegory, as in *The Holy Grail*. Then there is no confusion, and the poem is in the highest degree poetic. What I say applies to the mixed poems, like *Mertin and Vivien*. Moreover, the artist's childlike pleasure in the tale, and his sympathy with its passionate elements, are replaced (when the allegory is too obviously intruded) by a want of naturalness, even by a kind of pride in cleverness, which that *parvenu*, the analysing intellect, always brings into poetry. I sometimes seem to detect that Tennyson really loved the work his intellect did on the allegory more than the work his imagination did upon the story; that he loved the meanings he inserted into the tale more than the noble tale itself. This was a great mistake on his part, a mistake that artists make when they are seduced by the understanding. No one, a hundred years hence, will care a straw about the allegory; but men will always care for the story, and how the poet has made the persons in it set forth their human nature on the stage of life. The humanity, not the metaphysics, is the interesting thing, and Malory's book, though Tennyson decries its morality, is more human, more moral, than the

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Idylls of the King. Even the far-off mythic Arthur is more at home with us than the Arthur of the *Idylls* whenever we are forced to consider him as the rational soul.

Tennyson was led away from this simple human position, yet he loved his mistake, "Accept," he writes to the Queen, "accept this old imperfect tale":

New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul
Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; or him
Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one
Touch'd by the adulterous finger of a time
That hover'd between war and wantonness,
And crownings and dethronements.

This is to like his allegory better than the story, the work of his intellect more than the work of ancient imagination; and there are a good number of persons who will thank Tennyson for this kind of thing. They will be happy to find out all about the allegory, and when they have found it out, and labelled all the characters and explained the metaphysical relations of these shadows, will persuade themselves that they are enjoying poetry. It is, however, an enjoyment of the understanding, not one of the imagination, a pleasure in analysis, not in beauty. Let them have their way; they have their reward. But our reward will be to be able to leave, as much as possible, the allegory alone, and to be happy with that which is passionate, sensuous, human, simple and lovely in the poem, and in the ravishment the imagination has in the seeing of these things.

There is plenty of opportunity for such work, in

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spite of the allegory, in the *Idylls of the King*. The romance of the story has caught hold of the imagination of Tennyson, and in his treatment of it he has made many fresh and delightful inventions—not allegorical, but romantic. He has had great pleasure in opening out and developing the ancient characters, in clothing them with new dresses of thought, in fitting new emotions to the old events in which they play their parts. He has re-created some characters altogether: and even the leading personages are frequently quite independent of his allegory. He has built up around his people the image of a whole country, with its woods and streams, hills and moors, marsh and desert, dark oceans rolling in on iron coasts, vast wastes, ancient records of a bygone world; hamlets and towns and wonderful cities, halls and great palace-courts with all their varied architecture; storms, and sunshine, all kinds of weather, Nature in her moods of beauty and brightness, of gloom and horror. And over them he has shed a light from the ancient time, a romantic air and sky. These things belong to art.

Moreover, within the realm of art much might be said of the technic of the verse. The poem belongs—though its composition stretched over so many years—to the central period of the blank verse of Tennyson, before he had wrought out (not to his or our advantage) a new kind of blank verse for his dramas, the habitude of which stole into the blank verse of his old age, and made it in undramatic poems less musical, less delightful, even less skilful than it was of old. But here, through this long series of poems, the blank verse is of almost equal excellence throughout. It is, as

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a vehicle of thought and emotion, entirely at the poet's command. He can make it do exactly what he likes. It has, at his choice, ease and rapidity, or slow and stately movement, or it echoes in its sound the thought, the scene, or the thing. It is by turns loud or low, soft or rough in spirit, fluid or rigid, abrupt, delayed, smooth, continuous, weighty and light. There are also none of the changes, tricks and placing of cæsura or accent which all the artists of the past in blank verse and especially Milton have used, with which Tennyson is not acquainted, and which he does not himself use with as much science as art. Yet the result is all his own. His blank verse stands apart, original, growing out of his own character and temper, and frequently modified and specialised by the special characters whom he is describing, and by the special forms of natural scenery which he paints. Lastly, it is extraordinarily concise—almost too concise. It sometimes becomes bald; its "tricks" are sometimes too plain and too often repeated; it often wants a rushing movement, and it is always a little too academic. We are too conscious of its skill, of the infinite care spent on it, of a certain want of naturalness; that is, it has the defects of its qualities. But we forget these defects when it is at its best. Then indeed it is extraordinarily noble, rolling like a full-fed river through the country of imagination. Such is it in *The Holy Grail*, in *Guinevere*, in *The Passing of Arthur*.

The Coming of Arthur, the first of these Idylls, is Tennyson's prologue to them all. The allegory

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and the story are both mingled in it—but in this poem the allegory is more prominent than the story. In this Induction, Tennyson, having now determined on an allegory, is forced to place its main lines before his readers.

The Idyll opens with the waste and harried kingdom of Leodogran, beast-ridden, heathen-ridden, and the weak king hiding with his daughter Guinevere in his castle. Then Leodogran calls on Arthur for help, and Arthur, riding by the castle, sees Guinevere, and loves her for his life; and having set her father free from foes, asks in reward her hand. So stand forth the two, Arthur and Guinevere, who are to grow more and more apart as life moves on; who, meeting in high youth and joy, are to meet for the last time in deep repentance and forgiveness on the banks of the river of Death—a whole world of failure and sin and the ruin of great hopes behind them: a common tragedy! Tennyson hews out these figures with a rough, animating chisel in this first poem. In the poems that follow they are finished. But he does all that is needed now, and does it well. Guinevere is but slightly touched, but Arthur's character is, as is fitting, more elaborately treated.

He is to be the ideal king—the ruler of men; the bringer of law and peace and good government into his world, the redeemer of waste places and wasted lives, the knitter together into one compact body of his knights for purity of life and overthrowing of wrong.

But he is to be more than king: he is to be the ideal man; and for that he must love. Love then is born in him; but it is put into connection

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with his kingly work. No work without love, but no continuance of love without work; equal love of woman and work, but neither the woman nor the man made more than the work. "But were I joined with her," cries Arthur,

"Then might we live together as one life,
And reigning with one will in everything
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live."

This is the ideal of marriage laid down in *The Princess*, and consistently supported through all the *Idylls of the King*; and herein is the emotional side of Arthur.

But his spiritual side is also sketched. He has dim dreams and visions, like the prince in *The Princess*, during which the outward world fades away. Strange and mystic powers from the unseen world stand round about him. He moves in God and in eternity while yet on earth; and in these hours all phenomena are mist and dream. The mighty warrior on whom it seems to his knights the fire of God descends in battle; the great ruler who is to this world's work as the glove is to the hand, cries in the spiritual hour when this solid earth is as a vapour, and in words worthy of a great poet—

O ye stars that shudder over me,
O earth that soundest hollow under me
Vext with waste dreams!

Then the allegorical side of him is sketched. His senses are so exalted that he sees the morning star at noonday; he comes from the great deep and

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goes to it again; he is made king by immortal queens; he is not doomed to death but to return and live again. The sword he wields blinds the eyes of men; the city he lives in and the great hall of his knights is built by the intellectual and spiritual powers.

Half, then, of this world, half of the mysterious world beyond, Arthur has the qualities of both, and does his work in both with equal steadiness and fire. As such, he smites his own spirit into those who love him, so that, when his knights swear allegiance, into every face there comes

A momentary likeness of the king.

So carefully, and with such foresight for the rest of the poem, is Arthur hewn out before us by the poet.

But another personage needs also to be introduced: Lancelot, friend of the king, yet the lover of the queen. He first appears with Arthur in the battle for Arthur's rights with the rebellious kings. They each save one another's life, and they swear on the stricken field a deathless love:

And Arthur said: "Man's word is God in man;
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death."

Alas! in the trust, and in the friendship, lies hidden all the tragic fate to come; and when we hear that Lancelot is sent by Arthur to fetch Guinevere, we know that the joy, splendour and hopes of the king are already doomed. The rift is in the lute which will make all the music dumb. What faith has bound together, unfaith

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unbinds. O tragic world and tragic life of man! Tennyson has lifted to the highest peak in this poem the early inspiration of the king and his people, that our pity may be wrought to fulness by the catastrophe. Only a hint here and there suggests the pain to come, but the hints are clear. There is admirable skill shown in the management of this.

Thus the characters are placed in preparation for the whole. The story, as story, is set afloat by the questions of Guinevere's father concerning Arthur's birth. Is he a lawful king or not? Arthur's knights tell Leodogran the old legend of Uther and Ygerne and the siege of Tintagil. Thus Tennyson keeps touch with the tale which is his basis; but after that, for the sake of his allegory, he invents, and Bellicent tells the story of Arthur's coronation, and the mighty oath by which the soul binds all the powers of man to follow him in purity to redress the wrongs of the world. In the midst there rises that fine vision of the Church as the Lady of the Lake—a splendid picture, in which every word is a symbol:

A mist

Of incense curl'd about her, and her face
Well-nigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
But there was heard among the holy hymns
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

Then, to restore the humanity of the tale, Arthur's youth with his half-sister, Bellicent, is pictured—one of Tennyson's homely pictures of domestic tenderness; and then, lifting himself

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easily into more exalted thought, he invents the magic story which signifies the coming of the soul into this world from the high heaven and out of the great deep. The allegory may be let go, but the description of Merlin and Bleys, descending while Uther is dying to the cove below Tintagil Castle, is a piece of noble poetry—half nature and half legend :

And then the two
Dropt to the cove and watch'd the great sea fall,
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame,
And down the wave and in the flame was borne
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried " The King !
Here is an heir for Uther ! " And the fringe
Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
Lash'd at the wizard as he spake the word,
And all at once all round him rose in fire,
So that the child and he were clothed in fire.
And presently thereafter follow'd calm,
Free sky and stars.

Scarcely less fine than this is the dream of Leodogran, and the description of the great church in the Maytime, and the stainless knights in white robes, upon the wedding morn—with the one touch, in which so much of tragedy is held, of the drooped eyelids of Guinevere, in whose heart lay Lancelot while her hand was clasped in Arthur's. Lastly, as a piece of glorious literature, there is the marriage and coronation song of the knights. It was not in the first draft of *The Coming of Arthur*. It embodies the thought of the poem, grips the whole meaning of it together. And its sound is the sound of martial triumph,

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of victorious weapons in battle, and of knights in arms. We hear in the carefully varied chorus, in the very rattle and shattering of the vowels in the words, the beating of axe on helm and shaft on shield. Rugged, clanging, clashing lines—it is a splendid effort of art. King Olaf might have sung it.

Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May ;
Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away !
Blow thro' the living world—" Let the King reign."

Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur's realm ?
Flash brand and lance, fall battle-axe upon helm,
Fall battle-axe, and flash brand ! Let the King reign.

* * * * *

Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May !
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day !
Clang battle-axe, and clash brand ! Let the King reign.

The King will follow Christ, and we the King
In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing
Fall battle-axe, and flash brand ! Let the King reign.

We hear its contrast in Merlin's song, as soft and flowing as the other was braying and broken, and we think with gratitude of the artist who could do both with equal ease. The graciousness of the rivulet-music and soft play of Nature is in the lines of this delicate song, and the gaiety of youth ; and mingled with these the deep and favourite thought of Tennyson of the pre-existence of the soul. It is pleasant to hear it, for we have companied with the shadow of tragedy :

Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow in the sky !
A young man will be wiser by and by ;
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.

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Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow on the lea !
And truth is this to me and that to thee ;
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

Rain, sun, and rain ! and the free blossom blows ;
Sun, rain, and sun ! and where is he who knows ?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.

In *The Coming of Arthur* the King is crowned and married, and the land subdued to peace and justice. The heathen and the Romans are driven out ; the Round Table established. Arthur sits on the judgment-seat, and there is a sketch of him in *Gareth and Lynette* doing this work. Knights ride away each day from the Court to deliver the weak from the oppressor ; and the young men of noble birth in the kingdom whom Arthur's character has inspired come, like Gareth, to Camelot to join his band, seeking knighthood and high adventure. So everywhere the Order is recruited, the King's power grows, and into all the knights, young and clean and eager, the King pours his spirit :

Clear honour shining like the dewy star
Of dawn, of faith in their great King, with pure
Affection, and the light of victory,
And glory gain'd, and ever more to gain.

All is well ; and the *Idyll of Gareth and Lynette* represents this golden time. In human affairs, in the history of great causes, in men's lives, in their love, there is a time of glad beginnings, such a beginning as Nature has in spring. Gareth is the image of this pleasant, prophetic time. He is also the image of the Arthurian kingdom in its youthful energy, purity, gentleness, ideality ; he is

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moreover the incarnation of the vigour, courage, gaiety, and audacity of youth. Nothing seems impossible to the King and the Round Table; nothing seems impossible to Gareth. When we are young, nothing seems impossible to us. "Madam," Youth says to Mother Nature, "there is no such thing as the impossible." Then Nature smiles, for she loves the bold; nevertheless, she strikes hard. If we are gay when we are smitten, she is on our side. We get our way for a time, and do what all the world says cannot be done. But if our courage fade at her stroke, or we take it sullenly, she frowns in scorn and tramples us beneath her feet.

Gareth was one of these bold, gay creatures. He did not mind being a kitchen knave, nor the taunts of Sir Kaye, nor the mocking of Lynette; and when Lancelot's spear hurled him to the ground, he broke out into frank laughter. Nor was he one whit daunted by the magic horrors of Night and Death. Fools of pagantry he thought them, and fools they are. The soul that laughs and loves and rides for the right, has the world at his feet while he is young.

Something of this was in the mind of Tenhyson when he invented and added to the story the symbolism of the knights that defended the fords of the river. The first was the Morning-Star, the second Noon-Sun, the third the Evening-Star, the fourth Night and Death. One by one they are overthrown by Gareth. His youth laughs at the attack which the temptations of youth, of middle age, of the evening of life, of death, of time itself, make on men—that long, wrathful siege of battering days

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Tennyson marks this meaning. In the carved allegory (a thing he has invented) near the hermit's cave, the rock bears five knights with the names *Phosphorus*, *Meridies*, *Ilesperus*, *Nox*, and *Mors* sculptured beneath them, and they are running down the soul—

A Shape that fled
With broken wings, torn raiment, and loose hair
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave,

It is "the war of Time," he says, "against the soul of man." But Gareth conquers all of them by audacity and gaiety. The encounters in this pageant are alike clear, varied, brief, set each in its own fair landscape, and the sound of the river accompanies them with warlike music. They are real enough, but they are also allegorical. It is easy for the faith and boldness of youth to conquer the sins and troubles of the dawn of life; it is harder to slay those of its noonday; it is harder still to overcome those of its late afternoon; and Tennyson's representation of the Knight of the Evening Star is full of original thought. He is old and hard; he blows a hard and deadly note upon his horn. A storm-beaten, russet, many-stained pavilion shelters him. A grizzled damsel arms him in ancient arms. Beneath his arms a hardened skin fits close to his body. All is different from that which the commonplace imagination connects with the evening star. We see the poet's meaning by the comparison he makes to illustrate the difficulty of Gareth's battle against the Knight of the Evening Star:

Till Gareth pant'ed hard; and his great heart,
Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,

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Labour'd within him, for he seem'd as one
That all in later, sadder age begins
To war against ill uses of a life,
But these from all his life arise, and cry,
"Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down!"

Nor is the representation of Night and Death, both of whom one champion images, less imaginative. The black horse, black banner, and black horn, the black armour painted with the white skeleton and helmed with the skull, are the ordinary thing. But the thunder gloom under which he rides, the chill of his aspect which strikes ice even into Lancelot, his huge pavilion which

Sunders the glooming crimson on the marge,

lift the work Tennyson does beyond the ordinary. And finally we reach thought, symbol, and full imagination together, when (the skull cloven by Gareth and then the helm) there issues forth from the black terror and the deadly chill the bright face of a blooming boy, "fresh as a flower new-born." It is Tennyson's view of Death, it is also his image of what it seems to youth, "to gaiety, to daring, and to faith. And the story ends with the pregnant line:

So large mirth lived, and Gareth won the quest.

All this part of the tale is vivid with pictures, touched with happy illustrations drawn from Nature, and steadily builds up into fulness the

* Here are a few of these illustrations. Gareth cannot wholly overthrow the Evening Star, no more

Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,
The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs
For ever.

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character of Gareth. But the beginning is not so well done. The scenes between Gareth and his mother, who strives to keep him under her wing, are much too long, and the mother's dulness of perception when Gareth places, in two illustrations, his position before her, and her last argument, that the King may not be the true King, and therefore Gareth must stay at home, are quite out of nature. It is not till Gareth escapes, and is on his journey

This also of the honeysuckle that flies about the cave :

Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle
In the hush'd night, as if the world were one
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness,

might have been said by Jessica in the night scene in Portia's garden

Take two others. The first likens the cloth of gold which Mark sends to Arthur to

A field of charlock in the sudden sun
Between two showers.

That is as quick-eyed as it is simple and true. See how the poet, to make our sight of the thing more brilliant, puts in "Between two showers," just as in the next his imagination makes the plant feel its own fate.

Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself
Root-bitten by white lichen.

Gareth drops his cloak, and breaks bright in arms, like those

Dull-coated things, that making slide apart
Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns
A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly

And the shield of the Noonday—

As if the flower.
That blows a globe of after arrowlets,
Ten thousand fold had grown, flashed the fierce shield,
All sun.

These come out of the full treasury Tennyson had collected in his mind of the precious sights of Nature.

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to Lancelot, that Tennyson recovers himself. And he does recover himself admirably in his description of Camelot, and the mystic gate, and the magic music, and the visionary impression that the city makes upon the imagination, and the meeting with Merlin. It is fine invention, and many a line is worth a magic spell.

Lastly, the first of the types of womanhood that Tennyson draws in the *Idylls* is Lynette, a fresh and frank young person, smart and thoughtless, quick-tongued, over-rude, over-bold both with the King and with Lancelot, but honourable and pure of heart—the petulant, impatient type. Such a woman may be charming, but Lynette's sauciness wants charm, just because too much of the masculine roughness of Tennyson speaks in her. I do not allude to her rude scorning of Gareth as the kitchen-knave and her unsavoury mocking of him, for all that is taken directly from the original story; but to the way in which Tennyson has expressed it, especially to his attempt to give it a humorous turn. Lynette in Malory's hands is entirely in earnest, and her character is throughout consistent. She repents of her abuse, but she has no humour, and she has no delicate sentiment. But in Tennyson's hands we cannot quite tell whether she is in earnest or not, and what humour there is attempted is like that of an undergraduate.* Lynette, overdone in this way, is more of a study

* It is curious that a poet, whose humour is so excellent in *The Northern Farmer*, and the other dialect poems, should fail so completely when he tries to be humorous in the *Idylls of the King* and in the Dramas. When, for example, Geraint is irritated by the villagers, who answer all his questions by

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of the saucy type of woman than a real woman. Moreover, when Tennyson wants to improve her, and show fineness of nature in her, he divides her from herself. She becomes full of sentiment, and when she sings those charming little songs which one by one embody the change of her view of Gareth, they are over-delicate for her previous character. We cannot fit

O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,
O rainbow with three colours after rain,
Shine sweetly : thrice my love has smiled on me,

with a voice like this :

Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon !—to me
Thou smellest all of kitchen as before.

Malory does not make that mistake. Lynette is one woman in his hands. In Tennyson she is two, and the two do not agree.

talking of the knight who calls himself the Sparrow-hawk, he cries :

A thousand pips eat up, your sparrow-hawk !
Tits, wrens, and all wing'd nothings peck him dead !

Tennyson means him to be spleenfully humorous, and he is only absurd. When in the next two lines he leaves humour alone, he is excellent. Geraint cries out :

Ye think the rustic cackle of your bourg
The murmur of the world ! What is it to me ?

Then he tries to be humorous again :

O wretched set of sparrows, one and all,
That pipe of nothing but of sparrow-hawks !

This is ridiculous on the lips of a stately knight. The only explanation I can make is that the solemn vehicle of heroic blank verse, and especially of blank verse so elaborate and academic as that of the *Idylls of the King*, is wholly unfitted for the expression of humour.

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I cannot make the same criticism with regard to Enid, whose character fills the next two Idylls, *The Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid*. Enid is one woman, both as girl and wife. As Lynette is the type of petulance, so Enid is the type of patience. She is Tennyson's Griselda. Lynette is audacious and free of tongue. Enid is silent in endurance of wrong. She is silent also when she ought to speak. She is afraid to blame Geraint for his sloth, because she knows he is slothful from love of her. And her fear, falling in with Geraint's suspiciousness, makes the trouble of the piece. Patience, when it is accompanied by fear or over-fancy, is turned from doing good to doing wrong. But, independent of this evil side of patience, Tennyson seems to like this kind of womanhood. Of all his women, Enid is the most carefully drawn, the most affectionate. She is gracious, but she is one of those women who do a great deal of harm to men. The defects of their patience make in men tyranny and selfishness, jealous overbearing and ugly suspicion. In bad men these evils grow worse, till the man turns into a brute. In a suspicious but noble-hearted man as Geraint originally was, they produce, and often with startling suddenness, detestable conditions of mind and life, out of which men like Geraint, being good at root, are shocked back again into self-knowledge and repentance.

This effect, however, is overdone by Tennyson. It would be difficult to find, outside of bad men, any one whose conduct is made more odious than Geraint's. Tennyson could not have recognised how far apart he wanders from what we call honour,

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nor do I think that his conduct is sufficiently motivated from the point of view of art. Only the *madness* of jealousy, and not mere suspicion, is enough to partly excuse all he thought and all he did. He is not even represented as having sufficient cause for his conduct. He is expressly said not to believe in Enid's loss of honour. Moreover from the very beginning he is not quite a gentleman. A few days before his marriage, he doubts Enid's affection for him; he wishes to prove her obedience, to test whether it is love for him she has, or desire for the splendours of a Court. If she will at a word, without reason given, come in her shabby dress to Court, then he will rest, fixed in her faith.

What sort of a man is this? He, at least, does not know what love means; lost in himself, in vanity and suspicion. There is nothing of this suspicion in the original story. Geraint there is, like Leontes, suddenly attacked by jealousy and its special anger when he hears his wife say that he is not the man he was. And this furious jealousy motives his rude conduct. Jealousy maddens, and the Welsh writer, careful for his hero's repute, expressly says that for the time he was insane. But Tennyson does not make Geraint jealous in this way, nor put him into the madness of jealousy. He is only suspicious and angry, and his conduct to Enid, far worse than it is in the original, has not cause enough at the back of it to make it possible. The position is overdone. Nor does Tennyson's short introduction to the second part in *Geraint and Enid*—

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O purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves
By taking true for false, or false for true --

give a sufficient reason for the meanness of Geraint. Many men, indeed, lose the use of life in that fashion, but if they are of noble nature, as Geraint is represented at first, they do not fall so low as he, they do not quite dishonour their original character, they do not lose all chivalry to a woman. Or if they do, they do it because they believe their wife to be utterly false to them. This cause is excluded by Tennyson. Geraint falls too low, and his fall has not sufficient motive. Art has failed Tennyson.

When the rumour about the Queen and Lancelot comes to Geraint's ear, he thinks that his wife may suffer taint because she is the Queen's friend, and he removes her from Court. Then he forgets all his duty and his fame in uxorious love of her. He fights no more; he lets his province fall into confusion. This is natural enough, and though he is suspicious and feeble, he has not yet altogether lost gentlehood. Men laugh at him for his weakness. His wife saddens, and, seeing her sad, his base suspicion that she is tainted deepens. He hears her murmuring one morning that she is no true wife, and leaps at once to the conclusion that she is not faithful in thought to him, bursts out into a reckless passion, and bids her ride into the wilderness with him—utterly careless of her, careful only for himself. When he meets the first three bandits, and she warns him, he cries: "If I fall, cleave to the better man"—an odious insult. In

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the midst of all this wrath, he eats like a man who has no trouble, and jokes at the mowers whom he has deprived of their dinner. When Limours (Enid's old lover) comes into the inn, and, seeing Enid alone, asks leave to speak to her, Geraint answers :

My free leave,
Get her to speak ; she doth not speak to me.

This is partly in the original, but what follows is not. While Enid sits in the room, Limours drinks and jests and tells loose tales. Geraint is pleased, and bursts into laughter! Then it is that he gives Limours leave to tell his wife of his love to her. What ensues is still worse. Limours is slain next morning, and Geraint (though it is Enid herself who has asked Geraint to defend her from his pursuit, though he has himself almost handed Enid over to Limours) calls Limours her lover. These vilenesses are added by Tennyson to the Geraint of the old tale. There is not a trace of the gentleman left in Geraint. Limours is twice the lover and twice the gentleman.

All this is overdone. It is impossible a gentleman could fall so low. It is also quite out of character with the days of chivalry in which the original story took its form. Moreover, as I said, the motive is not sufficient. Nor is Arthur's reproof to him sufficient punishment. His punishment ought to come in Enid's ceasing to love him. But Enid is not of that temper. She continues to love him ; but I wonder, even with her, whether in the future there was not some mild contempt mingled with her love. There would have been

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if Geraint fell as low as Tennyson makes him fall. Enid's love, after Geraint's conduct, is even more improbable than Griselda's.

Independent of this main criticism, the poem is well wrought and full of beauty. The story is skilfully introduced, continued, and ended. The pictorial passages, and these are brilliant, are full of many happy touches of light and colour, happy asides of sentiment, with epigrams of wisdom and thought scattered among them like jewels on a golden robe. There is no weariness as we read: the eye sees something new, the ear hears some fresh sound, the heart and brain are stimulated from line to line. The work is delightful throughout from this point of view—concise, chosen, and luminous. We wish nothing out of it, and rarely anything into the descriptions. There is no modern poet who has painted his landscapes in fewer words, and yet who painted all that was needful to make the scene, as far as he chose to see it, leap out before the eyes:

So thro' the green gloom of the wood they past,
And issuing under open heavens beheld
A little town with towers, upon a rock,
And close beneath, a meadow gemlike chased*
In the brown wild, and mowers mowing in it;
And down a rocky pathway from the place
There came a fair-hair'd youth.*

He has rejected every unnecessary detail. I think he has rejected too much of his original, which I give below, but he is judge.* At least he has.

* Here is the original in Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the *Mabinogion* :- " And early in the day they left the wood, and they came to an open country, with meadows on one

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carefully kept the human figures. The mowers mowing, the youth descending the path, strike forth the landscape. From 1842 onwards, indeed earlier when that brilliant apparition of Paris in *Enone* issues from the wood, Tennyson rarely painted a landscape without humanity, and he places his figures with all the skill of a painter. He knew that Nature alone was not half as delightful as Nature and man together. Lover of Nature as he was, he avoided the crowning fault of modern poetry—the unmitigated merciless description of Nature, trickling on for fifty and a hundred lines together, without one touch of human interest. He knew the great masters—Homer, Virgil, and the rest of those who see and feel at the same moment—too well to fall into that dreary error. He was too much of a great master himself to commit it. It is from this impassioned mingling of the soul and sight of man with the soul and sight of Nature

hand, and mowers mowing the meadows. And there was a river before them and the horses bent down and drank the water. And they went up out of the water by a lofty steep, and there they met a tender stripling, with a satchel about his neck, and they saw that there was something in the satchel but they knew not what it was. And he had a small blue pitcher in his hand and a bowl on the mouth of the pitcher. And the youth saluted Geraint," &c. &c.

That this is more alive, that there is more of the witchery of representation in it than in Tennyson's lines, illustrates what is elsewhere said of the loss sometimes in his natural description of charm, and especially of livingness, from too great a devotion to conciseness. The river is gone, and the horses bending to drink; and the river is the living spirit of the landscape. I am sorry also to lose my curiosity about the satchel. Above all, why have left out the eye of the picture, and in colour too? How could he leave out the blue pitcher? Tennyson had no intense love of colour. He was no Venetian. Black and white were his favourite vehicles. Few of his shadows are in colours.

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that the specialised loveliness arises which charms us, and dignifies itself, in the descriptions of Tennyson. There is no finer example of this than in Geraint's first sight of Enid. We see the castle courtyard, the ruined towers, with all their grass and flowers and ivy, as with the naked eye. But in the midst we see Geraint and Yniol, and then we hear Enid singing and the castle court is filled with her. Nothing can be closer to nature than these lines, which describe the ivy climbing the castle; every word is alive with fact:

And monstrous ivy-stems
Claspt the gray walls with hairy fibred arms,
And suck'd the joining of the stones, and look'd
A knot, beneath, of snakes—aloft, a grove.

Wordsworth would have given a life of its own to that, but Tennyson draws it only as it is, leaves it, once he has brushed it in, and passes on to fill the ancient court with youth by Enid's voice, and to make her voice awaken fatherly love in Yniol's heart and passion in Geraint's. They stand still, enthralled, looking up, and listening. And Enid sings that song of fortitude in poverty, of the mastery of the soul in good or evil fortune, which is so finely written that it speaks the very soul of enduring manhood and womanhood all over the world.* There is as much strength as there is beauty in the whole scene; and the two comparisons of the effect on Geraint of Enid's voice are one of

* The motive comes from Dante; but with what grace and beauty it is varied and enhanced! The soul of the girl is in it, and the soul of the situation. And it fits, enlightens, strengthens and consoles those everywhere who are in a similar condition

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the noblest instances we can give of that sweet keen delicacy in Tennyson which, in contrast with his bluff power, is so pleasant a surprise. Let me quote the passage :

And while he waited in the castle court,
The voice of Enid, Yniol's daughter, rang
Clear thro' the open casement of the hall,
Singing ; and as the sweet voice of a bird,
Heard by the lander in a lonely isle,
Moves him to think what kind of bird it is
That sings so delicately clear, and make
Conjecture of the plumage and the form ;
So the sweet voice of Enid moved Geraint ;
And made him like a man abroad at morn
When first the liquid note beloved of men
Comes flying over many a windy wave
To Britain, and in April suddenly
Breaks from a coppice gemm'd with green and red,*
And he suspends his converse with a friend,
Or it may be the labour of his hands,
To think or say, " There is the nightingale " ;
So fared it with Geraint, who thought and said
" Here, by God's grace, is the one voice for me."

To this first impression of her Enid is true throughout. Her patience is too overwrought to permit us to class her among the higher types of womanhood—indeed, these very patient women are always painted by men—and her own character is sometimes overwhelmed by the allegorical representation of patience Tennyson makes through her. But when we ignore this, and get down, below the type, to her natural womanhood, Enid is full of truth and life. When she hears that she is loved by Geraint and lies awake all night ; when she longs

* Chaucer also saw these spring colours of the young trees—
Some very red, and some a glad light green.

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to be beautifully dressed to pleasure her lord and do him credit ; when she slips from her couch into her golden dress, like the star of morn from a bank of snow into a sunlit cloud ; when time after time she warns Geraint of his foes ; when she is left alone in the bandit hall and thinks Geraint is dead, and sends the power of her suffering and her nature into the rude crowd, she is always of the same strength and gentleness, always sweet with a sacred charm, so that we do not wonder that Tennyson was so moved with his own creation as to write about her some of the loveliest lines he ever wrote of womanhood, when once more at home in her husband's heart she rides away with him from the savage lands :

And never yet, since high in Paradise
O'er the four rivers the first roses blew,
Came purer pleasure unto mortal kind
Than lived thro' her, who in that perilous hour
Put hand to hand beneath her husband's heart,
And felt him hers again : she did not weep,
But o'er her meek eyes came a happy mist
Like that which kept the heart of Eden green
Before the useful trouble of the rain.

And with these lines, beautiful with a paradise of tenderness, I leave these Idylls of Geraint and Enid.

Balin and Balan, the Idyll next in order in the completed book, was the last published by Tennyson. It shows no weariness of hand or brain, no lack of his clear conciseness, no want of imaginative presentation either of the moods of men or Nature. The blank verse is as skilful and robust

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as ever, only a little more abrupt, less flowing than in the earlier Idylls. The subject, however, continually demands this abruptness, for Balin is the incarnation of natural violence of temper. The intellectual treatment of the story is as fine as the imaginative. If we compare the tale as it is in Malory with Tennyson's re-making of it here for the purpose of his allegory, we shall understand how acutely, skilfully, and profoundly the combining intellect has built up the skeleton of the tale before the imaginative passion put flesh upon it and sent the blood racing through it. As he painted in *Geraint* suspicion growing into rudeness and meanness, and in *Edyrn* pride, or rather arrogance—and these evils things as enemies of the soul of man—so he paints in *Balin* the general idea of furious anger as another enemy of the soul. *Balin*, for Tennyson clings at times to the theory of heredity, drew this temper from his father. He was begotten in an hour of wrath. He was banished from the Table Round for an outbreak of violence. He is restored to it by Arthur and begins to learn gentleness from Lancelot and the King. But his moods, born in his blood, leap on him like fiends, and he despairs. The gentle temper of the Court is too high for him, and he takes to the wild woods again, his rage now turned upon himself—the chained rage “which yelped within him like a hound.” Struggle after struggle he makes against himself; and well, and with an imaginative ethic, these are varied and drawn by Tennyson. The last struggle is that which he makes by keeping before his eyes the Queen's crown upon his shield. But the

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good this is to him is destroyed when he hears from Vivien that the Queen is false to Arthur and with Lancelot. His two ideals are overthrown. He bursts into frenzy, tramples on his shield, and Balan, his brother, mistakes his unearthly yell for the cry of the Demon of the Wood. Ignorant of their brotherhood, these two charge one another, and both fall wounded to death. Vivien removes their helms, they recognise each other, and their farewell is one of the most pathetic things which Tennyson has written.

"O brother," answered Balin, "woe is me!
My madness all thy life has been thy doom,
Thy curse, and darken'd all thy day; and now
The night has come. I scarce can see thee now.
Good-night! for we shall never bid again
Good-morrow. Dark my doom was here, and dark
It will be there. I see thee now no more
I would not mine again should darken thine.
Good-night, true brother."

Balan answered low,
"Good-night, true brother here! Good morrow there!
We two were born together, and we die
Together by one doom:" and while he spoke
Closed his death-drowsing eyes, and slept the sleep
With Balin, either lock'd in either's arm.*

This study of Tennyson's of Anger is quite original, and is made vivid by other characters clustered round it which exhibit different aspects of the same passion, of the means to overcome it, and of the powers opposed to it. It would be interesting to make a full comparison of it with the various Angers of Spenser—with the Wrath in the chariot

* Compare Mrs. Barbauld's—

"Say not Good Night,—but in some brighter clime
Bid me Good Morning."

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of *Pride*, with the Furor of the second book of *The Faerie Queene*, with the frenzy of Pyrochles and Cymochles. In Spenser these characters are wholly allegorical. In *Balin and Balan* the human element is greater than the allegorical. The inevitableness of Balin's fate makes the pity of it. The constant love of the two brothers is drawn with as much tenderness as beauty, and the ethical lesson which is indirectly given by their story does not arise from the allegory but from their human fates, their sorrow and their love.

Again, two new elements are introduced into the general representation, directly opposed one to the other—asceticism in King Pellam, and luxury (in the old sense of the word) in Vivien. Pellam, leaving human wrongs to right themselves, retires to his castle, lichen-bearded and grayly draped with streaming grass—

A house of bats, in every tower an owl—

scarcely eats, repudiates his wife, and lets neither dame nor damsel enter his gates, lest he should be polluted. Tennyson's hatred of asceticism, of monkery, of the gloom and curse of it, is here accentuated. It has risen far beyond that which he felt when he wrote *Simeon Stylites*. He intensifies it when he represents King Pellam as taking it up from spiritual conceit and to spite King Arthur. Moreover, he attacks the chief evil which follows asceticism when he makes Garlon, King Pellam's son, into the lover of Vivien the harlot, and places his lair in a cave, so black that it is like the mouth of hell. This horror of asceticism, of all religious views which separate men from doing

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the work of justice and love in the open world, is fully developed, but in a different way, in *The Holy Grail*.

Vivien is the other element, now for the first time brought into the whole poem. She is here altogether allegorical, the incarnation of that impurity of sense which is, in Tennyson's mind, the bitterest enemy the soul can have, which more than all else breaks up and ruins not only States but also the powers by which States are made and held together—justice, knowledge, harmony, order, truth, true love, man's energy and woman's insight. All go down before her attack, and the next Idyll develops her fully.

Lastly, the descriptive power of Tennyson, which in the previous Idylls is concentrated into separate passages, is here diffused through the whole. When we have finished the Idyll, we see the whole wood—great trees, dense underwood, sweet springs, wolf-like caves, lonely castles, long avenues of trees, green glades, shadowy demons and hoar-headed woodmen in it. It is not separately described; it grows up, as the wood of Arden grows before us, from notes of woodland scattered among the action of the piece; and a delightful example it is of an artist's work.

There is, however, one little touch of direct description of Nature in this Idyll which enables me, by contrasting it with Coleridge's image of the same thing, to mark out a quality in Tennyson's natural description. There is a spring in the wood, and the spring makes a clear pool with a sandy bottom. Tennyson looks into the spring, and sees the sand leaping up under the water-glass,

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impelled by the fountain jet. Balin and Balan sit statuelike—

To right and left the spring, that down
From underneath a plume of lady-fern
Sang, and the sand danced at the bottom of it.

The thing to be seen is perfectly clear, and no poet in the world could put it into a shorter phrase. This is Tennyson's brief, concise method, and it has its special value. And now let us hear Coleridge telling the same story of the spring and the dancing sand :

This sycamore, oft musical with bees—
Such tents the Patriarchs loved ! O long unharmed
May all its aged boughs o'er-canopy
The small round basin which this jutting stone
Keeps pure from fallen leaves ! Long may the spring,
Quietly as a sleeping infant's breath,
Send up cold waters to the traveller
With soft and even pulse ! Nor ever cease
Yon tiny cone of sand its soundless dance,
Which at the bottom, like a Fairy's page,
As merry and no taller, dances still,
Nor wrinkles the smooth surface of the fount.

The comparison of these, for the purpose of saying 'which is the best, would not be fair, for Tennyson, as I have said already, refrains deliberately in these stories, lest the human interest should be overwhelmed, from any set description of Nature ; and Coleridge has given himself wholly to such description. Nevertheless, the two pieces illustrate two methods—the concise and the expanded—of describing Nature ; and Tennyson, as he grew older, loved and used the concise method more and more. We meet very rarely in his

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later work anything like the long description of the land around the town of Lincoln in *The Gardener's Daughter*. It was his way, and we are grateful for it; but, on the whole, I love Coleridge's way better. It is more pleasant that the piece of Nature we have to see should be dwelt on with curious love, coloured as well as outlined, played with by the imagination, as when Coleridge turns the cone of sand into a fairy's page, as merry and no taller, dancing alone. This pleases more, and I feel in it the life that is in Nature more than in the other. But Tennyson is no less the artist than Coleridge, only he is an artist of another kind. We should feel ourselves happy to have these different musicians of Nature, whose varying harmonies fit our changing moods; for it is not by saying that one poet is better than another that we shall win a good delight for ourselves, or learn how to see or company with beauty. It is by loving each of them for his proper work, and by our gratitude to them all.

There are two things which, according to Tennyson, break up the Table Round; which first decay and then destroy the work of Arthur. The first of these is the lust of the flesh, and the second is mystic-ascetic religion. *Merlin and Vivien* represents the first, and *The Holy Grail* the second. Tennyson expresses in them the set of his mind towards two recurring problems of society. He looked, and in the direst light, on the growth of sensuality, on the indifference to purity, on the loosening of the marriage vow, on the unchaste

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results of luxury of life, on the theory and practice of free love, as one of the worst evils, and perhaps the worst, which can afflict individual, social and national life. The sin of Lancelot and Guinevere, which he takes care to represent as induced by a love almost irresistible and as supported by unbroken faithfulness, and which does not therefore wholly destroy the noble elements in their characters, is nevertheless (though "the light that led astray seemed light from heaven," though every excuse that can be made for it is made) the primal cause of the ruin that follows. The sin of these two high-placed persons, however modified in them, initiated and licensed an unmodified guilt of a similar kind, and brought with it when it was committed by others not as noble as Lancelot or Guinevere, lightness of character, loose desire, scorn of truth and honesty in the things of love, and naturally in other matters; and, finally, a luxurious life, in which the doing of justice and the support of good government were neglected for sensual enjoyment.

There is a difference between Lancelot, faithful all his life to one love, and Gawain who lightly flies from one to another all his life; between Lancelot, whose love was mingled with a vast remorse, and Tristram who in the Idyll of *The Last Tournament* has, in the airy cynicism of free loving, become careless of faithfulness, and then uncourteous towards the woman whom he once loved so well. Nevertheless it was not in Tennyson's way to finally excuse Lancelot and Guinevere because they loved faithfully. He brings all the ruin back to them. It is their guilt also which made the invasion

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of the Court by Vivien possible—that is, through their love, with all its faithfulness, the lust of the flesh stole in, and the whole of society was corrupted. Again and again this point is made by Tennyson. No matter how seeming fair an unlicensed love may be, no matter how faithful and how deep, it ends in opening to others the door to sensuality, which itself has no faithfulness, no depth, and no enduring beauty. Guinevere is followed by Vivien, and Lancelot by Tristram. That is his view, and I give it without comment. It is part of the ethical message Tennyson chose to set forth for our society.

But the state of things to which he finally brings Arthur's Court and realm—the state of which Vivien is the true queen—is not reached at once. There are reactions against it, and such a reaction is described in *The Holy Grail*. It was not a useful nor a permanent reaction, though it was a religious one. On the contrary, it did as much harm to the State and to Arthur's work as the sensualism. But then it would not have done so much harm had it not been for the previous existence of the sensualism. That had weakened not only individual moral power, but the collective force of righteous statesmanship, so that work for the good of the whole people no longer seemed the best and wisest thing. It was better, men, who were half repenting of a sinful life began to think, to pursue after a mystic and ascetic holiness than to live naturally in the present world and strive to make it wiser and happier. It was better, or pleasanter, to seek for supernatural excitements of religious passion than to confirm the good and deliver the oppressed and

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walk humbly with God in the common duties of home, society and the State. This is only another form of sensualism, or its probable consequence. The unbridled life according to the senses induces a condition both of body and mind which cannot do without excitement. When, therefore, as in Arthur's realm, there is a reaction against sensualism and folk turn to religion, they demand a religion which replaces the sensual by a spiritual thrill, or by the excitement of the miraculous; which revels in the mystic ecstasies of ascetic purity; which thinks that human love injures the love of God; and which takes men and women away from their nearest duties.

This, in Tennyson's mind, was a deadly misfortune, not only for the spiritual life of the individual, but for the civic life of societies. In making this clear, he spoke another part of what he conceived to be his message to his time. How far he was right is not the question here, but what he thought is. He was of the school of Maurice and Kingsley in this matter. He deliberately attacked in *The Holy Grail*, but with some of a poet's tolerance and pity, this kind of piety. He allowed the possibility of its truth and fitness in a few persons of the temper of Galahad and Percivale's sister. He abhorred it in the generality of men and women. Its origin was chiefly in the senses, and its end was the dissolution of all true work for mankind. This is the aim of *The Holy Grail*.

"Our question now is, In what manner, from the literary point of view, has he done this double piece of work—this attack on impurity and on ascetic and sensational religion? For the work

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is not only allegorical, it is also a story; not only symbolic but human. In what fashion, then, are wrought, first *Merlin and Vivien* and then *The Holy Grail*?

The conception of Vivien, from the allegorical point of view, is always careful and sometimes fine, and keeps close to the traditional symbolism of Luxuria. She is born of rebellion, that is, of disobedient pride. Her father dies fighting against Arthur. Her mother brings her forth on the battlefield, and, giving her birth, falls dead. She is thus cradled in bloody war, war for which there is no greater cause in all history than the lust of the flesh. She is also cradled in death: "Born from death am I," she says, "among the dead," for sin and death are woven together, warp and woof. The first of sins in the mind of the ancient Church is pride, and the second lust, and death is their child. Milton in his mighty symbolism makes Satan, immediately after his rebellion, give birth to Sin from his head, and then, burning for her beauty, beget Death upon her; and Death, in turn, unites himself in unnatural guilt to his mother Sin. This is a horror terrible enough for the Titanic imagination of Milton. Tennyson's symbolism falls far below that huge conception; but then his story interfered with his allegory, as his allegory interferes with his story.

Vivien, thus bound up with death, causes physical war and death. She also leaves behind her moral death in men's souls, and death of law and order in States.

Another symbolic touch is given when she says that she was "sown upon the wind." Perhaps

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Tennyson thought of the text, "They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind"; but the main thought is the inconstancy and fierceness of the lust of the flesh, its veering and fluttering fancy, its tempest-wrath and fury at other times; and it is in the yelling of the storm that Vivien has her way with Merlin. Then she is corrupted by Mark, king of Cornwall, whose life and Court are set opposite to Arthur's. Injustice, falsehood, cruelty, are his characteristics, and out of these are born coarse cynicism in sensualism, and hatred of pure love. Vivien, under his tuition, is shown the truth betimes—

That old true filth, and bottom of the well,
Where Truth is hidden.

Therefore when she hears of the vows of chastity at the Court of Arthur, she does not believe that a single one of the knights is pure. Absolute unbelief in good is part of the mere lust of the flesh. With it is hatred of those who differ from herself, and deep hatred makes her cruel, fearless, and deceitful. Then, there is nothing she does so easily as lying, and the lying, combined with hatred and unbelief of goodness, causes her to be the furious slanderer, or the soft-sliding suggester of slander. This is Tennyson's outline of sensuality and of its attendant sins.

This allegorical outline is filled up carefully, and in nothing better than in Vivien's sincerity. She makes a bold defence of the lust of the flesh being the proper god and king of the world. Of this god she is the worshipper, the priestess, and the missionary. There is a song of hers in *Ralin and Balan* which

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glorifies the fire of the appetites and senses. It might have been written for the worship of Astarte, and it is splendidly imagined by Tennyson. It sets the sensual side of pagan Nature-worship into the keenest contrast with the self-control of Christianity. The fire from heaven she speaks of is not the holy fire of the pure spirit; it is the fire of that heaven which some have conceived, and which consists in the full enjoyment of desire. It is this blaze of desire which she sees in all Nature as well as in man, and it creates, she thinks, the real beauty of the world. Tennyson got to the heart of the thing in this exultant pagan song. Take the two last verses :

The fire of Heaven is on the dusty ways,
The wayside blossoms open to the blaze.
The whole wood-world is one full peal of praise,
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell.

The fire of Heaven is lord of all things good,
And starve not thou this fire within thy blood,
But follow Vivien thro' the fiery flood!
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell!

Then turning to her squire : " This fire of Heaven,
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,
And beat the cross to earth, and break the King
And all his Table." *

This is Vivien as she is—honest, true, and bold, confessing evil and rejoicing in it. The whole sketch of her in *Balin and Balan* is of this strain

* See in *The Holy Grail* what the Paynim people say to Sir Bors ;

What other fire than he,
Whereby the blood beats, and the blossom blows,
And the sea rolls, and all the world is warmed?

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of triumphant daring. Her tale of slander about the Queen is there delivered with a ring of conquest in it. Her mocking of her boy squire and of Balan has the bravery of a queen of sin. She laughs loud at the fools of knights who have cast away their lives when they were goodly enough to have "cropt the myriad flower of May." She has not only no pity, but active cruelty. Come, she cries to her squire, I cannot brook to look upon those wounded to the death—leave them to the wolves.

It is a fine sketch—better, I think, than anything contained in *Vivien and Merlin* itself. In that Idyll Vivien comes to the Court. She creeps and whispers through it, sowing the seeds of slander and of her own impurity. She leavens the lowest characters, as Arthur does the highest. She fixes the scandal of Lancelot and Guinevere in all men's minds; and finally flies away with Merlin that she may destroy his use and name and fame by the spell which consigns him to a living tomb. The incarnation of the pure intellect is ruined by the lust of the flesh.

There is no need to tell the story of this Idyll. It is excessively disagreeable, but it is chiefly disagreeable because its form is ill-conceived. The main tale is as old as humanity. It is the tale of knowledge, of experience, of philosophy made foolish in old age by a woman, that she may gain the glory of a conquest at which she will laugh for a week with the young. It is so common that it has formed one of the folk-tales of the world. The most famous of these is the bridling and saddling of Aristotle by the mistress of Alexander, and her riding

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the philosopher up and down the garden paths in the sight of the king. Tennyson re-invents this common tale, and his way of doing it is open to the gravest criticism. There are noble episodes in the poem, passages of fine ethical quality, passages of creative imagination; but as a whole, and especially in the conceptions of Merlin and Vivien, it is not only in the wrong, but unpleasantly in the wrong.

Vivien almost ceases to be allegorical, and is represented as a woman. She is endurable as long as she symbolises the Lust of the flesh. We know that in the realm of allegory the personification of Luxuria must be made devoid of any possibility of good. But when Vivien is made a woman, as in this Idyll, she is detestable. Absolute falsehood, unredeemed meanness, "motiveless malignity," are not found in sane humanity, and Vivien is all the three. She is not a woman at all. Not even the very worst of her type was ever like her. This native inhumanity makes her ways and speeches unnatural, and, because unnatural, vulgar. All the art of the piece, because of this error in form by which Vivien the woman is confused with Vivien as Luxuria, is not good in art. The immense skill Tennyson bestows upon it is wasted.

The conception of Merlin is equally unnatural. The story of an old man allured to his ruin by a young woman is in itself almost too disagreeable for art to take as a subject; but if it be taken, it ought to be kept within nature; it ought not to be made revolting; it ought to be excused and made piteous by a kind of madness in the man. And

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this is done in the original tale in Malory. Merlin there falls into a dotage; he is "assotted" by one of the Ladies of the Lake. Love in an old man, the most miserable and cruel of all the forms of passion, turns the wise magician into a fool; and the Lady of the Lake, herself quite pure, but weary to death of him, works the spell upon him and buries him under a rock. This is natural and human, and it wakens our sorrow and pity; moreover, it excuses the man and the woman. But Tennyson has chosen to work it otherwise. Merlin is not in love; he only wavers on the verge of affection. He has not lost his senses or his sense. He is as wise as ever; he sees through Vivien; he even hates her character, her slander and her foulness of soul; he suspects she wants to destroy his use and fame and name—and yet he yields. Up to the last moment he is in full possession of his good sense, and then he is swept away by the woman's importunity, by a momentary warming of his blood. He is made by this, not an object of pity, but of contempt. Had he been in love, he would have been a fool as Vivien calls him; but he would have been assotted, in a dotage from the beginning. As it is, he is not mad, not a fool, but he is suddenly self-degraded. And yet he says nothing base, which makes the art of the piece all the worse. The conditions and the position are out of Nature; or, if such a thing can be in Nature, it is too improbable for art to use as a subject, and too ugly.

Of course, to make such a conception endurable at all, the greatest intellectual skill has to be employed, and Tennyson labours at the situation

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he has invented. It is done by the understanding, not by the imagination ; for the imagination would refuse to work at this false conception. The speeches Merlin and Vivien make are concocted, not created. The worst of them are Vivien's. Tennyson had some notion of what the man would say, but he did not know what the woman—and especially this type of woman—was likely to say. His ignorance of such women does not make his work better. Nevertheless, in the midst of this main current of the story there are islands of noble poetry ; and there are episodes, apart from the story, which belong to the pure imagination. One part, even of Vivien's representation, is admirable. It is her outburst of false tenderness, during which she sings the song of "Trust me not at all, or all in all," which begins :

In love, if love be love, if love be ours,
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers ;
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.

It is the little rift within the lute
That by and by will make the music mute,
And, ever widening, slowly silence all.

This song is excellent in its representation of half-true, half-false sentiment, and for the subtle way in which the false sentiment in it is made to overtop the true. It is all the more excellent when we contrast it with that true rendering of Vivien by herself in the song which extols the fire of the Pagan heaven. Merlin detects its masked untruthfulness, and sets over against it the song he once heard sung by a young knight in the early days of Arthur's reign, when they projected the founding

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of the Round Table for love of God and men.
This is a lovely, clarion-versed passage—one of the brilliantly-invented episodes which occur in this Idyll :

Far other was the song that once I heard
By this huge oak, sung nearly where we sit :
For here we met, some ten or twelve of us,
To chase a creature that was current then
In these wild woods, the hart with golden horns.
It was the time when first the question rose
About the founding of a Table Round,
That was to be, for love of God and men
And noble deeds, the flower of all the world.
And each incited each to noble deeds.
And while we waited, one, the youngest of us,
We could not keep him silent, out he flash'd,
And into such a song, such fire for fame,
Such trumpet-blowings in it, coming down
To such a stern and iron-clashing close,
That when he stopt we long'd to hurl together,
And should have done it ; but the beauteous beast,
Scared by the noise upstart at our feet,
And like a silver shadow slipt away
Thro' the dim land ; and all day long we rode
Thro' the dim land against a rushing wind,
That glorious roundel echoing in our ears,
And chased the flashs of his golden horns
Until they vanish'd by the fairy well
That laughs at iron.

A speech of Merlin's follows, on true love and fame, and their relation each to each, worthy of the study of all men and women, and done in Tennyson's weightiest and fullest manner. The more excellent it is in itself, the more it reveals the unnaturalness of the main conception. That Merlin should so speak, and an hour afterwards yield as he yielded, shocks both intelligence and feeling. But the speech is not only good ; it is

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also personally interesting. It tells us Tennyson's thoughts about his fame, and his desire to have his fame in the use that his poetry may be to the world. Merlin's memory of what he felt when he looked as a young man on the second star in the dagger of Orion, is so particular a recollection that I cannot but imagine that Tennyson is relating a story of himself:

A single misty star,
Which is the second in a line of stars
That seem a sword beneath a belt of three—
I never gazed upon it but I dreamt
Of some vast charm concluded in that star
To make fame nothing.

If this conjecture be true, we see the poet in his youth, dreaming of fame and yet controlling his dreams. It is Tennyson all over, and this sober self-control, standing guard over fervent imagination, is one of the secrets of his power. But the most brilliant of the episodes, happy in invention, vivid in imaginative treatment, is the story Merlin tells of his magic book and the origin of the spell by which he is finally overcome.

Moreover, in dispraising the drawing of Merlin under Vivien's temptation we should not forget to praise the drawing of his state of mind at the beginning; the melancholy for himself and the world that fell upon him in dark and dim presentiment, and the illustrations from Nature by which it is imaged. Merlin before his vanishing, and in the prophetic air of death, sees all the woe that is to be, all the fates of Arthur's kingdom:

Then fell on Merlin a great melancholy:
He walk'd with dreams, and darkness, and he found

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*A doom that ever poised itself to fall,
An ever-moaning battle in the mist,
World-war of dying flesh against the life,
Death in all life and lying in all love,
The meanest having power upon the highest,
And the high purpose broken by the worm.*

This is greatly conceived and felt, and equal to it in poetic power—one of Tennyson's most subtle and splendid illustrations—is this :

So dark a forethought roll'd about his brain
As on a dull day in an ocean cave
The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall
In silence.

The full power of human imagination is added in those lines to the business of the sea, and lifts the thing into a great nobility ; while in his next illustration of the same presentiment he describes exactly what many have seen but few observed :

O did ye never lie upon the shore,
And watch the curl'd white of the coming wave
Glass'd in the slippery sand before it breaks ?
Ev'n such a wave, but not so pleasurable,
Dark in the glass of some presageful mood,
Had I for three days seen, ready to fall.

It remains to say one word of the scenery of the piece and of its close. We are in the wild forest of Broceliande in Brittany. Great meadows, full of buttercups, fill the space between the sea and the huge wood. The wood is of ancient oaks ; in it there are glades, and sweet springs dropping from the rocky clefts, and fairy wells ; and Merlin and Vivien sit near a hollow oak, the same, perhaps, that Heine saw. There the storm overtakes them, and they refuge in the hollow tree. As the lightning

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leaps and the thunder peals, Vivien flies into Merlin's arms and has her way :

And ever overhead
Bellow'd the tempest, and the rotten branch
Snapt in the rushing of the river-rain
Above them.

It is a habit of Tennyson's, as I have said before, to make Nature reflect the passions of man, and the end of *Vivien* is no exception to this common rule.

The Idyll of *Lancelot and Elaine* follows that of *Merlin and Vivien*. Woven in and out of it is the story of the development to which the love of Lancelot and Guinevere had now attained, and this is one of the best and most human pieces of work in the Idylls. I will, however, keep it for a more fitting place. The character of Elaine herself and her story can be put with brevity, and it is not difficult to see why Elaine follows Vivien.

Elaine is set over against Vivien in the fullest contrast. As the root of Vivien is conscious guilt, so the root of Elaine is unconscious innocence. As Vivien has the boldness of Hate derived from lust, so Elaine has the boldness of Love derived from purity. Vivien lives in the dry, clear world of cynicism. Not one wavering mist of fancy clouds her cruel eyes—not one imagination of love touches her. Elaine lives in a world of dim fantasy and all the fantasy is born of love. She was happy, not knowing she was happy, till she saw Sir Lancelot. Then she loved, and loved for her death. She is the

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Lady of Shalott (Shalott is Astolat) over again, but with a tender difference :

Out flew the web and floated wide,
The mirror crack'd from side to side,
" The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

Vivien lives, Elaine dies—it is the way of this world. But Elaine begins in joy. Lancelot, riding in secrecy to the jousts for the diamond, comes to Astolat, the castle of Elaine's father, and leaves his shield, since its emblazonings would reveal who he was, behind him. And Elaine, who, having seen him once, has loved him at first sight and for ever, keeps the shield in her chamber, and with the creative fancy of a maiden, weaves histories over every dint and scratch made in it, conjecturing when and where :

This cut is fresh ;
That ten years back ; this dealt him at Caerlyle ;
That at Caerleon ; this at Camelot ;
And ah, God's mercy, what a stroke was there !

" So she lived in fantasy "—and a beautiful and true picture it is of a young girl's heart ! If the dreams of young imagination, as Wordsworth sings, keep pure the heart, the pure heart of youth has lovelier imaginations than any experience of life can bring, sweeter and more varied fantasies than any genius that has sinned and sorrowed. But they are always silent. Tennyson has seen, clearly this beautiful thing. In all his work there is nothing truer to womanhood than his picture of Elaine ; and true to that moment of womanhood so difficult to represent, when the girl, suddenly touched by a great

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love, becomes the woman. If here and there the allegorical element enters into her, it is not obtrusive, and it is a comfort to be freed from it. This is a real woman: not symbolic, but human. Her blood is eloquent upon her cheek; she lives most keenly when she dies. Her movements are thoughts, her thoughts are passions. Her dead body speaks. She is a true creation.

Nor do I know anything in his work more tender than her character, her love, and her fate. The tenderness of Tennyson is one of his remarkable qualities—not so much in itself, for other poets have been more tender—but in combination with his rough power. We are not surprised that his rugged strength is capable of the mighty and tragic tenderness of Rizpah, but we do not think at first that he could feel and realise the exquisite tenderness of Elaine. But, no: both are in his capacity. It is a wonderful thing to have so wide a tenderness, and only a great poet can possess and use it well.

Moreover, with the power of delicate tenderness goes subtlety of treatment; and Elaine was exceedingly difficult to do with sufficient fineness of touch. Her innocent boldness might well have become unmaidenly. She does not conceal her love; she lets Lancelot see it; she strives to make him hers; finally, she confesses her love to him, she will be anything to him—if not his wife, to follow him as servant.

Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
"I have gone mad. I love you; let me die."
"Ah, sister," answer'd Lancelot, "what is this?"
And innocently extending her white arms.

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"Your love," she said, "your love—to be your wife."
 And Lancelot answer'd: "Had I chosen to wed
 I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine;
 But now there never will be wife of mine."
 "No, no," she cried, "I care not to be wife,
 But to be with you still, to see your face,
 To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world."

She rises to the very verge of innocent maidenliness in passionate love, but she does not go over the verge. And to be on the verge, and not pass beyond it, is the very peak of innocent girlhood when seized by over-mastering love. It was as difficult to represent Elaine as to represent Juliet; and Tennyson has succeeded well where Shakspeare has succeeded beautifully. It is great praise, but it is well deserved. Moreover, had her love been commonplace, if true love is ever commonplace, she might have been somewhat injured in our eyes. But the greatness of Lancelot excuses her. She loves no young carpet-knight, but the noblest; gaunt with battles without, and his face marred with fierce battles within. He wins her heart as Othello won Desdemona by telling of glorious wars, and few battle-passages are finer than Tennyson's rapid and fierce sketch on Lancelot's lips of the twelve great battles, and finally of Arthur standing after the last fight on the top of Mount Badon:

High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume
 Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,

* * * * *

I never saw his like, there lives
 No greater leader.

"Save your great self, fair lord," said Elaine to her heart. And next morning he rode away, wearing her favour, which her innocent daring asked him to carry,

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and leaving her his shield. When she hears of his dreadful wound—

Through her own side she felt the sharp lance go.

It is a line of which Shakspeare might be proud. When Gawain asks for her love, she is not ashamed to tell him she loves Lancelot. She cannot rest at home, having heard of his wound, and begs her father to let her go and tend on Lancelot. It is a lovely passage, and she woos her father to her will as sweetly as a bird sings; and then, going, she hears in her heart:

Being so very wilful you must die.

And her conviction that she will die of her love excuses all her devotion to one who does not care for her. When to the world she would seem unwomanly, she is most womanly. Certainty of death dissolves conventions. When she sees Lancelot she utters

A little tender dolorous cry;

and when he kisses her as we kiss a child, it is more to her:

At once she slipt like water to the floor :

And all her heart's sad secret blazed itself
In the heart's colours on her simple face.

And, having tended him into health, she tells her love, and he offers her all friendship and its offices. "Of all this will I nothing," she cries, and, swooning, is borne to her tower-room, and Lancelot rides away. All this is beautifully, intimately conceived. Nor is her death less graciously, less powerfully wrought.

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These are lovely lines which tell of her lonely watch at night :

Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd : the owls
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt
Her fancies with the fallow-rifted glooms
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And the song that follows, how simply wrought it is, and yet how subtly—with the subtlety of long passion's inter-woven thought :

Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain ;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain ;
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

Love, art thou sweet ? then bitter death must be :
Love, thou art bitter ; sweet is death to me.
O love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

I fain would follow love, if that could be ;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me :
Call and I follow, I follow ! let me die.

This is almost like a piece out of the sonnets of Shakspeare, full of his to-and-fro play with words that are thoughts ; with the same kind of all-pervading emotion in the lines ; the same truth to the situation and the character of the singer ; and with Tennyson's deep-seated waters of love—which too rarely come to the surface—welling upwards in it. That which follows is almost at the same level :

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind
That shook her tower, her brothers heard, and thought

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With shuddering, "Hark the Phantom of the house
That ever shrieks before a death," and call'd
The father, and all three in hurry and fear
Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn
Flared on her face, she shrilling, "Let me die."

Then, out of that great passion she entered into quietude, and set forth her funeral, becoming in her memory a little child again. For she remembers how often she wished to pass the poplar on the stream, and might not; but now she will, laid in her boat, pass beyond it, dead, and so sail with her dying message to Lancelot into the very palace of the King. Therefore, this being promised her, and saying many beautiful things of trust and honour, in innocence and cheerfulness she dies.

A fair life and a fair death! It is sorrowful, but she had her joy. She loved; she loved one worthy of her love, and her heart made him worthier still. Of him she believed no wrong, for in herself there was no wrong. Her innocence was more than earth could bear, and it was well it was borne away to heaven. None may dare to mourn her fate; it was as blest as the heart of love could make it. There are, like her, rare souls on earth so wonderfully fortunate in their fate that our troubled hearts cannot imagine their happiness; and she was one of these. Our pity is with Lancelot, with Guinevere, with Arthur, but not with her.

The story of the Holy Grail, the Holy Vessel, traces its origins back to a remote antiquity. The oldest elements of the tale were Celtic (chiefly Irish), and their symbolism was not Christian,

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but heathen. Two sets of stories, according to Mr. Nutt, were the starting-point of the Grail legend. In the first set a kinsman avenged a blood-feud by means of three magic talismans—the sword, the lance, and the vessel; in the second set the hero visits a castle under a spell, and finds all its indwellers fed by a magic vessel, and living by its means a prolonged life; from which fortune or misfortune they are freed by the hero asking a question about the vessel. When these two tales were mixed up with the tale of Arthur, they were thrown together into one story. The Grail, the sword, and the lance mingle in this one story all the powers they have in both the series of tales. The two castles become one castle. But the most important amalgamating element (which was sure to run both stories into one) was that both the castles—that to which the avenger goes to find lance and sword for his work, and that to which the hero goes to set free from the spell those who are kept immortal by the vessel—are both symbols in the original Celtic tales of one and the same thing—of the other world, the fairy-land of eternal youth. How this single story came to be Christianised is a question which still remains under debate. But it is plain that when it became Christian in Britain it had a local habitation. It had housed itself in Glastonbury, where possibly under Welsh rule a small heathen temple dedicated to Bran was transformed into a Christian church. Bran in Celtic mythology was the ruler of the Other World and would have in his charge these talismans; the sword, the lance, and the cup. When the temple became the church, Bran was

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turned into a saint, and his magic gear naturally takes a Christian meaning; and the first notion of the cup and the lance as connected with Jesus, the feeder of His people, whose blood saved them, and whose side was pierced by the lance, would then arise. That is, the characteristics of Bran the heathen god of the far-off world of eternal youth, and the gear that he possessed, were transferred to Jesus, and fitted to the story of the Gospel.

Then an addition to this, and a modification, were made from the legend of Joseph of Arimathea in the Gospel of Nicodemus, a gospel which had a great vogue in England in early English times. A fuller Christian import was given to the Grail from the story of Jesus in that gospel. The Grail is now the dish used at the Last Supper, and that with which Joseph caught the last drop of blood which fell from the side or the feet of Christ. Joseph, thrown into prison, is supernaturally fed from this sacred vessel for forty-two years.

The next step is when a British legend brings Joseph to Britain, and the Grail is laid up at Glastonbury. Joseph takes the place now of Bran. After his death, the Grail is hidden from men, until the destined knight appears who is to achieve its Quest. Then its meaning further developed. It became the symbol of the mightiest miracle of the Roman Church, of the change of the substance of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus. Thence arose the great and fruitful conception of the search for the Holy Grail as the search for absolute union with Christ. A few, now and again, behold it. It seems a crystal cup with rose-red beatings as of a heart in it, and with it is often a

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platter on which bread lies, into which bread a white child smites himself. It holds then the body and blood of God. When the knights of Arthur see it in the hall, it appears covered; thunderings and lightnings attend it, and the roofs rack and rive as it passes by. The heroes leap to their feet, and swear that for a year and a day they will take up the Quest to see it uncovered. This is only one form of the manifold tales of this Holy Quest. A hundred poets took it up, and wove round it the romantic adventures of a hundred knights. The people loved it for its adventures; the Church loved it, for it brought, by means of the tale, all the poetic enjoyment of the people into close contact with the central doctrine of the Church of Rome.

There is one more thing to say. Before the Grail embodied the full sacramental meaning it had, while it was yet half heathen and half Christian, Percivale is the hero of the Quest; but when the notion of absolute chastity, of total division from woman as the necessity for perfect union with Christ, spread far and wide, Percivale was not pure enough to achieve the Quest, and Galahad, the virgin in body and soul, was invented. A new series of tales having Galahad as hero, and glorifying virginity, now arose. To this there was one exception. When the story of the Grail was used by Wolfram von Eschenbach in Germany, we find Percivale in his pre-eminent position; and Tennyson, in this Idyll, reverts as it were unconsciously to the original importance of Percivale.*

* This is a remark of Mr. Nutt in his delightful book on *The Holy Grail*. I have followed his explanation of the development of the Grail story—an explanation largely, it should be

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It is Percivale that tells the story—we see Galahad through his eyes. Nevertheless it is the virgin Galahad alone who in the *Idylls* fully wins the Quest, who, not only always sees the Grail, but finally goes with it to that spiritual city which is the Christian representative of the Welsh Avalon, and also of the Irish Tir-na-nogue, the land of undying youth.

So far Tennyson clings to the ecclesiastical form of the tale. But though he accepted the virginity of Galahad as necessary for the achieving of the Quest, the spirit of his poem is whole leagues away from the ideal of the Galahad-romances which glorified a life of complete spiritual asceticism, and which, conceiving that woman was the great plague and evil matter of the world, made this hero reject, as deadly to spiritual perfection, human love and marriage.

That was not the ideal of Wolfram in the *Parsifal*. Parsifal in Wolfram's poem is the ideal king who marries the woman he loves and completes his life in her, whose work is to stay in the world, and to make it better by noble government. Tennyson takes this line in the *Idylls*, but he is plainer than Wolfram, for Wolfram only lets us infer his view. Tennyson deliberately sets himself to make an allegory, the meaning of which shall be—That ascetic

noted, hypothetical, owing to the nature of the evidence upon which the student must rely. This caution applies with especial force to that portion of the hypothesis which assumes the conversion of a heathen Bran into the Christian Bron. It may be added, however, that although considerable research had been bestowed upon the Grail legend since the appearance of Mr. Nutt's book (1888), no alternative hypothesis has been propounded that has won the acceptance of scholars.

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religion, an exciting pursuit of signs and wonders, severance from home and from the common love of man and woman, and a retreat from the daily work of the world into cloistered seclusion or in pursuit of a supernatural spiritualism, are, save for a few exceptional characters, entirely evil. These things dissolve societies, injure human life, and produce the very evils they are invented to overcome. The opposite life to that, the life of Arthur, is the right life.

In this modern re-making of the legend of the Holy Grail the symbolism of the story is wheeled right round by Tennyson. The search for the Holy Grail is a mistake; an evil, not a good. The true life is to bring heaven to earth for others; the untrue, to seek, apart from earth, a heaven for one's self. Nevertheless, like the wisest poets who are not intolerant of all theories of life but their own, nor ignorant of the variousness of man, Tennyson allows that there may be a few for whom this virgin, ascetic, spiritual life is fitted, and who perform, in that life, their own special work of representing before mankind the ideal holiness, the immortal quest of perfection. And he chooses to put this point in the persons of Percivale's sister and Sir Galahad.*

* I think there is more in it than this. The image of the stainless knight, wholly apart from sex and appetite, divided from the material interests of the world, a pure spirit clothed for a time in flesh, but the flesh so refined by the spirit that it becomes archangelic matter, a terrible crystal of pure love; moving in the supernatural world, with all its powers round him, while yet on earth—this image, independent altogether of ascetic theology, was one of the finest "motives" art could have; and its artistic elements were a great part of the reason why it entered the heart of the world and lodged there

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Percivale's sister is admirably drawn, all the main characteristics of the mystic female saint, like Catherine of Siena, are embodied in her; and the picture is made by scattered touches given with apparent lightness through the story. She was no cold-hearted maid. The type of which she is the image has a passionate temperament:

A holy maid tho' never maiden glow'd,
But that was in her earlier maidenhood,
With such a fervent flame of human love.

This passion, rudely blunted, turned to an ardent longing for union with Christ. In that longing all that was earthly in her wasted away, till in her eyes alone shone fire, the spiritual fire of holiness that had power to awaken in others the same desire:

And so she pray'd and fasted, till the sun
Shone, and the wind blew, thro' her, and I thought
She might have risen and floated when I saw her.

At last she sees the vision, and she sees it through her own high-wrought and delicate passion. It comes, attended by such music as an ethereal ear might hear—as of a silver horn far off, blown o'er the hills, a slender sound, unlike

Wolfram's *Parsifal* drops to a lower level of art because he did not use this "motive." When Wagner imagined the *Parsifal*, he felt an artist's need of this motive, and he restored this other-world purity to Percivale. When Tennyson took up the story, he preserved this virgin, spotless ideal of Galahad, even though his view of human life and duty was opposed to the ascetic life connected with it. He could not miss the dazzling ideal of Galahad as an art-subject. The artist, as it were against the man's will, was stronger in him than the social moralist. Galahad remains Galahad. Tennyson even adds another image of the same conception in a woman, in the sister of Percivale

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all earthly music. And when the Grail streams through the cell, the beam down which it steals is silver-cold, as the maiden heart that sees it; but the Grail is rose-red; in it are rosy beatings as of a living heart, and the white walls of the cell are dyed with rosy colours. Cold to earth, ecstatic to heaven; it is the very vision of a mystic maiden's passionate purity. And the verses are fitted to the vision. Then, recognising a kindred soul in Galahad, she weaves a belt for him out of her hair, and speaks to him in the language of earthly love, yet there is no earth in it.

“ My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,
O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,
I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt.
Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,
And break thro' all, till one will crown the king
Far in the spiritual city: ” and, as she spake,
She sent the deathless passion in her eyes
Thro' him, and made him hers, and laid her mind
On him, and he believed in her belief.

From point to point, the representation embodies the whole type, gathering together into one personality many characteristics of separate enthusiasts.

Galahad is different. He sees the same glory, but he does not retire from the world, save in spirit. He is still the warrior. He has courage to sit in the “ Perilous Seat,” in which whosoever sits, loses himself. Merlin was lost in it, seating himself in it inadvertently. But Galahad, claiming loss of self as salvation—and the whole passage with Tennyson's spiritual meaning in it is his own invention—sits in it of set purpose, crying, “ If I lose myself, I find myself,” and sees the Holy Grail.

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After that, day by day, the thing is always with him :

Fainter by day, but always in the night
Blood-red, and sliding down the blacken'd marsh
Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top
Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
Blood-red.

But it companies with him, not to send him to the cloister, but to war. "I rode," he cries,

"Shattering all evil customs everywhere,
And pass thro' Pagan realms and made them mine,
And clashed thro' Pagan hordes and bore them down,
And broke thro' all, and in the strength of this
Came victor."

His hour has now come to be crowned in the spiritual city, and he bids Percivale go with him, and see his departure. In conception, in invention, in description of invented landscape, and in artistic work, this passing of Galahad is splendidly written. It is too long to quote in full, too knit together to be spoiled by extracts, and too poetic to criticise. It is its own best criticism.*

This great and lofty vision of the glory of the

* This beginning I may quote. Whoever has seen, while involved in it, a fierce thunderstorm on a mountain-top, and the pine-forests below smitten by the quick-gleaming bolt, will know with what extraordinary truth and force Tennyson has made it.

There rose a hill that none but man could climb,
Scarr'd with a hundred wintry watercourses—
Storm at the top, and when we gain'd it, storm
Round us and death ; for every moment glanced
His silver arms and gloom'd : so quick and thick
The lightnings here and there to left and right
Struck, till the dry old trunks about us, dead,
Yea, rotten with a hundred years of death,
Sprang into fire

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pure spiritual life, refined and thrilled by heavenly holiness into full union with the world beyond the sense, and needing no death to enter into the perfect life, is done as no one has done this kind of work since Dante. It is made all the more vivid, and its unfitness for the common toil of goodness on this earth is shown, by the contrast which Tennyson immediately makes to it in the daily life of the poor monk Ambrosius, who knows nought of marvels, but is the providence of the little village near which he lives; who does not understand these unearthly visions, but who pities the men who, having known the sweetness of love, surrender it for dreams. His head swims when he reads of ecstasies and dreams, and then "I go forth," he says, "and pass

Down to the little thorpe that lies so close,
And almost plaster'd like a martin's nest
To these old walls—and mingle with our folk."

And the delightful description, which follows these lines, of the work of this small, comfortable and comforting village priest shows not only how Tennyson liked this type, but also marks the range of a poet who could, as it were in one breath, write the sublime passing of Galahad and, immediately after, this homely, loving sketch of a small monk's life in a small world.

These then, Percivale's sister and Galahad, were the two, woman and man, who might attain the vision of the perfect love through utter separation from the flesh—that is, in the Christian idea, through loss of self. But, in attaining it, they were ravished from earth and the work of earth. All men and women were as phantoms to them. They left behind them

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the impression of excelling purity, and that was good; but it was purity severed from humanity, and that was not good.

But as to the rest of the knights, who made their vow to see the vision of the Grail, the greater number failed to see, but did not fail to be useless. They "followed wandering fires," lost themselves and were lost to men. A few saw something, but not the whole. The vision comes to each according to the soul of each. Lancelot, who has made the vow to seek the vision of pure holiness and love, while his heart loves his sin, sees the Grail covered, but sees it as holy wrath, and fire, as swift and stern condemnation. That which is sweet and gentle to Galahad—the light of which is soft rose, and the colour and the music of which is as of a silver horn among far hills to the sister of Percivale—is to Lancelot a stormy glare, a heat

As from a seventimes-heated furnace,

from which he swoons, blasted, and burnt, and blinded. We hear how the others fared, according to their character. But however the vision came or did not come, the pursuit of it, as Tennyson thought, was the ruin of noble association for just government, the contradiction and not the realisation of true religion. It breaks up the Round Table. The kingdom is left without its defenders, and when the remnant return they are exhausted. Their failure to reach ideal goodness has made them reckless, and drives them into base materialism. That which was left of truth and purity in the court lessens day by day. Sensuality, in swift

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reaction from asceticism, has full sway, and the fall is rapid. But where then, Tennyson asks, is spirituality to be found, where pure holiness, and love which beholds the invisible kingdom? It is to be found where Arthur found it, in the midst of human life, in honest love of men, in doing our duty where God has placed us.

Arthur, who represents this view of Tennyson, has, he says, his own visions. He has more. He sees God, not as a vision, but face to face. He does not wander on the quest of the Holy Grail, but He whose sacrifice of love the Holy Grail embodied is always with him. So says the king, and Percivale, less spiritual in his ascetic solitude than Arthur, does not "know all he meant." For, and I quote the passage, it is Tennyson's summing up of all the Idyll and its allegory:

"Some among you held, that if the King
Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow;
Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
That which he rules, and is but as the hind
To whom a space of land is given to plow.
Who may not wander from the allotted field
Before his work be done; but, being done,
Let visions of the night or of the day
Come, as they will; and many a time they come,
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth.

* * * * *

In moments when he feels he cannot die
And knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
Who rose again: ye have seen what ye have seen."

So spake the King; I knew not all he meant.

I turn now to the literary quality of this poem.
I have written at large concerning its allegory,

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because this Idyll, unlike the rest, is pure allegory. It does not come under the objection I have made to the others in which the allegory and the story are mixed together to the troubling of both. In this Idyll, the story is Tennyson's own; he has invented it for the sake of his allegory. The form then is excellent, and the excellence of the form has acted throughout upon the minor inventions within the main invention, on the verse, the metaphors, and the details. It is good from beginning to end; the most unexceptionable piece of work that Tennyson has done in the *Idylls*. Criticism has nothing to object to; it is lost in admiration and respect.

The framework of the tale could not be better conceived. Sir Percivale who has known the great world tells the story to Ambrosius, a simple brother of the monastery who knows nothing but his village. This invention enables Tennyson constantly to contrast the exalted with the simple type of mind, the earth-loving with the heaven-loving soul. Again we hear in the remarks of Ambrosius the same views as those which Arthur held concerning the Quest, given, not in the high words of the king, but in the simple thoughts of the uneducated monk who loved the daily life of men. This was a happy thought of the artist. It leads up to and doubles the force of Arthur's view of the matter—that is, of Tennyson's decision of the whole question.

An inner unity is also given to the story and to its various episodes, which otherwise would be too unconnected, by their being knit up into the one tale of Percivale. We never lose the image of the

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quiet, war-worn knight, sitting with Ambrosius in the cloister. Even the unity of place is thus preserved. The great adventures and the great adventurers, the city of Camelot, the pictured hall and the fierce vision of the Grail that went through it, the ride of Percivale, the passing of Galahad, the wild voyage of Lancelot, are all brought into the still enclosure where the two peaceful figures sit in the sun. There,

Beneath a world-old yew-tree, darkening half
The cloisters, on a gustful April morn
That puff'd the swaying branches into smoke *
Above them, ere the summer when he died,
The monk Ambrosius question'd Percivale.

Then, step by step, every episode in order, each illustrating one another, each in its right place to advance and clinch the conclusion, the story, or rather the allegory in the story, flows on with such ease and simplicity, that it seems to grow like a tree by its own divine vitality. And each episode has the quality, character, and power of its chief personage stamped upon it and ruling its manner of representation, its invention, its wording, and even its rhythm.

I have quoted enough from the story of Percivale's sister and Sir Galahad to prove the splendour of the invention. Even when the story is not quite

* The stamen-bearing flowers of the yew are covered with an abundant yellow pollen, which the wind disperses. Each flower sends up its little puff of sulphur-coloured smoke. Thus the pistil-bearing flowers which, like small acorns, grow apart from the stamen-bearing ones, receive the pollen. This smoking of the yew, which belongs more to March than April, seized on Tennyson's observing fancy. He added a stanza to *In Memoriam* in order to use it in the poem. [xxxix.]

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new, as in the case of Lancelot's voyage to Carbonek, it is so entirely recast that it becomes a fresh pleasure—recast, not only for the sake of the allegory, but also for the joy that Tennyson, like a child, felt in the making of high romance. I illustrate this by three things in the poem. The first of these is Percivale's story of his setting forth upon the Quest. Tennyson's object is to show that pride in one's self, and its extreme opposite—despair of sin, which throws us back on self—alike render the life of exalted holiness impossible, because for that we must, like Galahad, lose self altogether.

Percivale starts full of joy in his own bravery, but as he goes, Arthur's warning that his knights in this Quest are following wandering fires occurs to him, and he drops down into despair. Then he sees a series of visions. A burning thirst consumes him; it is the symbol of the thirst for union with God. "And on I rode," he cries, and I quote this especially for its accurate description of Nature—

And when I thought my thirst
Would slay me, saw deep lawns, and then a brook,
With one sharp rapid, *where the crisping white*
Play'd ever back upon the sloping wave,
And took both ear and eye; and o'er the brook
Were apple trees, and apples by the brook
Fallen, and on the lawns.

And while he drank the brook and ate the apples, all fell into dust, and he was left alone, thirsting still, and in a land of sand and thorns. It is the symbol of the thirsty soul trying to find in the beauty of Nature its true home, and failing. Then he sees a woman spinning at the door of a

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fair home, and she cries "Rest here," but she and the house fall also into dust. It is the symbol of the soul trying to find rest in domestic love, and failing.

Then he sees a yellow gleam flash along the world, and the plowman and the milkmaid fall before it; but One, in golden armour, splendid as the sun and crowned, comes along—and he too, touched, falls into dust. It is the symbol of the soul seeking to be satisfied with the glory of the earth, chiefly to be attained in war. Then he finds a city on a hill, walled, and a great crowd that welcomes him and calls him mightiest and purest; but when he comes near, the city is a ruined heap, and the crowd is gone. It is the symbol of the soul seeking to slake its thirst by popular applause, and especially in the fame of a ruler of men, but all is thirst and desolation as before; and then he finds the valley of humility and of forgetfulness of his sins in the glory of God's love. It is a rich invention, and perfectly wrought.

The next illustration of this brilliant inventiveness is the description of the city of Camelot and of the hall of Arthur, and of the streets of the mediæval town when the knights depart on the Quest. The towers, the roofs, the ornaments of the town, the sculpture in the hall, the great statue of gold with its peaked wings pointing to the northern star, the glass of the twelve windows emblazoned with Arthur's wars, are all described as if the poet had seen them face to face, and with a richness which truly represents the gorgeous architecture and furniture of the old romances. Tennyson has absorbed and then

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re-created all he has read in them. I can scarcely praise this work too highly.

Lastly, there is the story of Lancelot's half-vision of the Holy Grail and his drift over the sea to the enchanted rock of Carbonek. Its basis is to be found in the old tale; but whoever reads it in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* will see how imaginatively it has been re-conceived. It is full of the true romantic element; it is close to the essence of the story of the Holy Grail; there is nothing in all the *Idylls* more beautiful in vision and in sound; and the art with which it is worked is as finished as the conception is majestic. I will praise it no more, but quote a part of it. To hear it is its highest praise. Lancelot, torn between his horror of his sin and his love of it, seeking the Grail that he might be free from his sin, yet knowing that he does not wish to be freed, is driven into a madness by the inward battle, "whipt into waste fields far away," and beaten down to earth by little folk, mean knights—and then "I came," he cries:

"All in my folly to the naked shore,
Wide flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew;
But such a blast, my King, began to blow,
So loud a blast along the shore and sea,
Ye could not hear the waters of the blast,
Tho' heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea
Drove like a cataract, and all the sand
Swept like a river, and the clouded heavens
Were shaken with the motion and the sound."

He finds a boat, black in the sea-foam, and drives in it seven days over the deep till it shocks on the castled rock of Carbonek whose "chasm-like portals open to the sea." Then climbing the steps he passes the lions:

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"And up into the sounding hall I past ;
But nothing in the sounding hall I saw,
No bench nor table, painting on the wall
Or shield of knight ; only the rounded moon
Thro' the tall oriel on the rolling sea.
But always in the quiet house I heard,
Clear as a lark, high o'er me as a lark,
A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower
To the eastward : up I climb'd a thousand steps
With pain : as in a dream I seem'd to climb
For ever : at the last I reach'd a door,
A light was in the crannies, and I heard,
'Glory and joy and honour to our Lord
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail.' "

Lancelot was not only the greatest knight ; he proves here that he was the greatest singer.

The story of *Pelleas and Ettarre* as told in Malory's book is natural, simple, and common. The ground of the trouble in the tale is also simple. It is the boredom of Ettarre. She is wearied of being loved by Pelleas, for whom she feels no love. "I have no peace from him," she cries. A woman in such circumstances is naturally cruel. These are simple lines on which to move a tale ; and the Pelleas of Malory is quite an ordinary person and his Ettarre not an uncommon character of the Romances. The love-tale also has nothing out of the common, but it is interesting ; it has the romantic air, and it goes up and down between pain and pleasure in an adventurous fashion, of which it is agreeable to read in a quiet hour. I need not tell Malory's tale, for the things that happen are much the same as in Tennyson's Idyll, at least as far as that place in the tale where Pelleas leaves Ettarre and rides away. At that point, Tennyson re-casts the

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story. Pelleas, in Malory's book, departs furious with the treachery of Gawain, and equally furious with Ettarre, not for her unchastity, but because she has loved another than himself. Tortured by these two angers, he takes to his bed to die of rage and disappointment. He is then found by a Lady of the Lake who has pity on him, cures his sickness, replaces his love of Ettarre by love of herself; and in order to avenge Pelleas on Ettarre, bewitches Ettarre into a hopeless love of Pelleas. Ettarre, drawn to his bedside, beseeches for the affection she has rejected. Pelleas cries out, "Begone, traitress!" and Ettarre dies of that sorrow. Then Pelleas goes away gaily with the Lady of the Lake.

There is no moral direction, nor indeed any special purpose, in the original tale. It is only a faithful record of a piece of human life, quite clearly and simply told. But Tennyson, when he took it, had a special aim in view, and wrote it afresh with a moral purpose. He wanted to represent the luxurious society which precedes the downfall of a nation, especially after the failure of a religious revival founded on the supernatural. The knights have now returned reckless from their unsuccessful effort to achieve the Quest of the Grail; not better but worse than before. Religion, they feel, is useless, and an ideal life absurd. They had been sensual, now they have become cynical. Vivien, the lust of the flesh, the enjoyment of the senses alone, is full mistress of the world. Ettarre represents this society; Pelleas represents its deadly influence on an innocent heart that believes in love, purity and truth, and their embodiment in the King. He finds a world in

which the King is thought to be a fool, purity ridiculous, love a lust, and the realm of the senses the only realm. Thrown suddenly and unprepared into this society, the full force of disillusion struck on Pelleas like a storm and sank him in the seas. He is the later Gareth of the *Idylls*. Frank, faithful, loving, innocent, he steps into life; but where Gareth is victor, he is victim. The conditions of society into which Gareth enters are all on his side. He finds life as beautiful and true as he imagined it to be. The conditions of society into which Pelleas enters are all against him. He finds life the exact contrary of all he imagined it to be.

Gareth's history, the history of Pelleas, are equally common stories. When, by long neglect, by long indulgence, a base society is made, the souls and bodies of far more than half of the innocent children sent into the world are murdered. When society is just and pure, simple and loving beautiful things, the children are destined to a noble happiness. Those who make a world of which the judgment of the pessimist is true, are the worst of criminals. Its children, for the most part disillusioned like Pelleas, are driven into madness or cynicism. And cynicism, or rather that recklessness of everything but of present excitement which is the forerunner of cynicism, is what Tennyson sketches in *Pelleas and Ettarre*. Ettarre and her flock of girls laugh at the innocence and the love of Pelleas. A grizzled knight, they say, who knew the fashion of the world were a better companion than this baby—"raw, yet so stale." Ettarre promises him her love that he may win the prize for her and give her fame, and when she has got her jewelled circlet,

IDYLLS: PELLEAS AND ETTARRE

flings his love away, flings a taunt at Guinevere, and leaves Pelleas outside her gates to cool his romance. She is the great lady of a debased society in which everything ideal is only matter of mockery. Such a society lives on the very marge of the incoming tide of weariness. It only continues to live by the fierceness of its strife to gain, hour by hour, enough of light or cruel amusement to keep that tide at bay. When Pelleas will not cease to believe in Ettarre, she is bored to death, and this turns to wrath, and wrath to hate; and when he endures all, she pushes him out of doors in bonds. When he goes, for a moment she knows herself. "He is not of my kind. He could not love me did he know me well." But the momentary touch of conscience fails when Gawain comes to see her, bringing merriment and the manners of the court with him, and she is guilty at once with him. This woman is Tennyson's ethical warning against a loose and luxury-bitten society, and, as ethics, it is well enough expressed. But to bind up these modern warnings with a mediæval tale is to render either the tale or the warnings feeble. The naturalism of the story suffers. The allegory eats it up. And the allegory suffers, for the ancient story does not carry it.

Moreover the whole Idyll is too plainly a stop-gap, a transition tale inserted, to represent the kind of society which intervened between the religious excitement of *The Holy Grail* and the cynical languor of *The Last Tournament*. It does not seem to have naturally grown out of Tennyson's original conception. I conjecture this, because there is little in it of the passion of an artist. The shaping

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of the poem is not fully imaginative, the work of it seems jaded, and even the verse is inferior to that of the other *Idylls*. When Tennyson attempts to rise into passionate expression, as when Pelleas turns and shrieks his curse at Ettarre and her harlot towers, he becomes only violent without power. Even the natural description suffers from the artist's apparent want of interest in his conception. That vivid sketch, at the beginning, of the wood and of the bracken burning round it in the sunlight, cannot keep up its speed and fire to the end. Either the poet's memory of what he saw played him false, or he did not see the thing with his usual clearness. It is like a studio-picture, not like one painted in the open air. Nor is there a single piece of noble or passionate writing in the whole of it, save at the very end, when Pelleas breaks into the hall of Arthur, swordless, and his ruined life upon his face, and will not speak to the Queen when she speaks to him.

But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce
She quail'd; and he, hissing "I have no sword,"
Sprang from the door into the dark. The Queen
Look'd hard upon her lover, he on her;
And each foresaw the dolorous day to be;
And all talk died, as in a grove all song
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
Then a long silence came upon the hall,
And Modred thought, "The time is hard at hand."

That is finely done; there is more of gloom and coming woe in it than in all the cursing of Pelleas. But it is alone; it is the only real good piece of art in this, the poorest of all the *Idylls*.

IDYLLS: THE LAST TOURNAMENT

The Last Tournament is more a work of art than *Pelleas and Ettarre*, though it is by no means up to the level, even in form, of many of the other *Idylls*. It also, like its predecessor, has the air of being an afterthought, of something inserted to point a moral, not to adorn the tale. Since the whole poem is a moral poem, we have no right to object that this portion of it points a moral, but we have a right to ask that it should seem a natural branch of the whole tree. Such a vital connection does exist in the first part; but the second part, the story of Tristram, is not much more than a graft, and far too plainly a graft. Tristram and his story are scarcely ever alluded to in the rest of the *Idylls*: he has nothing to do with the Tennysonian movement of the piece, and his story, thus foisted in at the end, is nothing more than an illustration of adultery. The form of the *Idyll* is spoiled, and we are forced to place it on the lower plane, along with *Pelleas and Ettarre*.

The time of the year in the preceding *Idyll* is full summer, and this represents, in Tennyson's way, the full flowering of the brutal society which he describes. But the season in which the last tournament is held is that of departing autumn—grey skies, wet winds, and all the woods yellowing to their fall. This also is Nature's reflection of the catastrophe in the *Idyll*. Arthur knows, when the tale is done, the guilt of Guinevere; and Lancelot and all his kin are finally divided from the king. Meantime we are first shown the further degradation of the society drawn in *Pelleas and Ettarre*. The story of this social picture is well introduced. The tale is told of Lancelot and Arthur riding

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through a mountain-pass and hearing a child wail :

A stump of oak half-dead,
From roots like some black coil of carven snakes,
Clutch'd at the crag, and started thro' mid-air
Bearing an eagle's nest : and thro' the tree
Rush'd ever a rainy wind, and thro' the wind
Pierced ever a child's cry.

And Lancelot climbed for the child, and round its throat lay a ruby carcanet which, when the child died, the Queen bade be tourneyed for. The purest knight, she said, should win for the purest maiden the jewels of this dead innocence. Hence the tournament is called *The Tournament of the Dead Innocence* by a court to which innocence is unknown. The prize is won by Tristram, the free-lover, and given to Isolt who abhors her husband. In this fierce contrast Tennyson strikes out on his canvas the mocking cynicism in which he involves the court. There is no innocence which is not dead, and there is no love which is innocent.

Secondly, before the jousts are held, we see how the government of the kingdom has broken down. A knight, once of the Table Round, has set up a new Round Table in the north, framed directly counter to Arthur's Table. He slays, burns, robs and maims the poor, hangs the knights of Arthur, and bids the King beware, for—

his hour is come ;
The heathen are upon him, his long lance
Broken, and his Excalibur a straw.

Arthur rides away to chastise this felon, and when he returns all is ruin. But before he goes—and this is finely conceived by Tennyson—he touches those two who have destroyed his work, and leaves

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an impression of himself upon them ; on Lancelot, that which kindles remorse in him, on Guinevere, that which awakens awe in her. She feels his apartness, his greatness, and his spirituality

In her high bower the Queen,
Working a tapestry, lifted up her head,
Watch'd her lord pass, and knew not that she sigh'd
Then ran across her memory the strange rhyme
Of bygone Merlin, "Where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

It is the theme, the introduction theme, of the Idylls that follow—*Guinevere, The Passing of Arthur*—and its dim melody, brought in here, is the thought of a true artist.

Then comes the tournament. A day of brooding storm, low thunder, sunless skies, and then of heavy rain, images, in Tennyson's fashion, the exhaustion, the dull coarseness and drabble of the last days of luxury and adultery. Lancelot, all weary, like a late guest over a fading fire sat umpire of the lists, half careless, half angry with the lawlessness and cowardice of the tourney. All its rules were broken ; and when Tristram entered the lists no one was brave enough to oppose him. The tournament ends in mockery and cursing, and Lancelot cries,

"The glory of our Round Table is no more."

When Tristram comes for the prize, Lancelot asks, "Art thou the purest, brother?" and Tristram scoffs, "Be happy in your fair Queen, as I in mine." There is no trace of shame left ; the nakedness of life is openly displayed. When Tristram rides round the lists with his prize he is discourteous to all

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the women. "This day," he cries, "my Queen of Beauty is not here." So, even the glory of courtesy, that last infirmity of chivalry, is gone. Then falls thick rain, and in the wet and weariness the women mock :

Praise the patient saints,
Our one white day of Innocence hath past,
Tho' somewhat draggled at the skirt. So be it.

At the revels which follow, the mirth is so loud that the Queen retires indignant, and in her bosom pain is lord. And the first part ends with a talk between Tristram and Dagonet the fool, which insists in other fashion on the ruin a general sensuality has wrought.

The second part takes up the ancient story of Tristram and Isolt, and the story is used and modified by Tennyson to represent another phase of illicit love and of its result on character. The love of Tristram and Isolt in his hands is of a very different type from that of Lancelot and Guinevere. Lancelot and the Queen have loved from the beginning, and through the golden times of the Round Table. The nobleness of the time, and the nobleness it made in them, pervaded their love, and lifted it above itself. It is always faithful, always courteous, always silent, always intense, and often repentant. But Tennyson makes Tristram and Isolt love without any nobleness. Their passion has nothing spiritual in it, nothing that lifts it into the imaginative realm. The light that leads astray is the fire of sense alone. Tristram is unfaithful, and has become uncourteous. He talks of the freedom of Love to love wherever it may please, and of their love failing when beauty fails, and when desire is

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cold. He speaks in this light, tossing way in the presence of the woman whom he has loved; and Isolt, though she shows indignation, suffers it at last with indifference. In the midst of this Mark comes by, and cleaves Tristram through the brain.

This sketch, not of our Tristram, but of an invented Tristram, of his lightness of character, and his random heart, of his wandering thought, of his soul led by the senses, and his conscience hushed by pleasure—and of the result of these characteristics made into a theory of life and love—is admirably done. What he is, is embodied in his song.

Free love—free field—we love but while we may;
The woods are hush'd, their music is no more:
The leaf is dead, the yearning past away:
New leaf, new life—the days of frost are o'er,
New life, new love, to suit the newer day;
New loves are sweet as those that went before
Free love—free field—we love but while we may.

The introduction of this Tristram story no doubt enhances, in another form, the whole of the ethical lesson to nations and to individuals which is contained in the first part, but I feel from the point of view of art that there are strong objections to the whole of it.

First, the old story of Tristram and Isolt is entirely changed and degraded. Tristram is not the Tristram we know, nor Isolt our Isolt; they are both vulgarised. All the romance is taken out of them; their great and inevitable love is turned into a common intrigue. Their mighty sorrow, which has drawn the heart of the world to it, which so many poems have made into a purification of the soul, and to which Wagner gave all his strength, is left

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untouched by Tennyson. Nay, their characters, as he draws them, are incapable of such a sorrow. No one has a right to alter out of recognition two characters in one of the great poetic stories of the world, and to blacken them. Tennyson ought to have had more reverence for a great tale, and more intuition. What he does is all the worse because portions of the ancient story are kept and dwelt on, so that we are forced to think back over the whole tale we know, and to see through this travesty the noble things which have been travestied. To make a great tale in this fashion the stalking-horse of morality, to use it for a passing shot at adultery, to degrade characters which are not degraded, is an iniquity in art. If Tennyson wanted to do this kind of thing for the sake of a moral end, he ought to have left the beautiful romance alone, and to have invented a quite new story for his purpose.

Moreover, this piece about Tristram and Isolt was quite unnecessary. The story told of them may, as I said, enhance by a fresh example the ethical aim of the first part; but it is weaker than the first part, and the lesson is as strong without it. The additional weight given by it is not worth the artistic mistake the poet makes in introducing it.⁶ The reader, made angry by the degradation of Tristram and Isolt, becomes angry also with the moralities of the beginning of the Idyll. The first part says all that was necessary to say, and says it well.

Thirdly, to shove in at the end, and into a corner, an immense story of human passion, covering as many years and as many events as the story of Lancelot himself, was a complete mistake.

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Tristram introduced as the victor in the jousts is well enough, and we may even endure his soulless talk, though it falsifies his ancient character; but to attempt to force a story, which is like a great sea, into this narrow pool, is beyond endurance, especially when the first event (that of the love drink), which, by making the love of these two inevitable, raises the tale into fatefulness, is deliberately left out. It would have, by excusing them, spoilt the ethical use which Tennyson makes of their story. This is too bad of him.

Moreover, Tristram and Isolt take us away from the main contention. At the very moment when the whole conception of Tennyson should have been concentrated into white light, in which everything else should be lost, around Arthur and Lancelot and Guinevere, we are carried away to Tintagil, and forced to remember at that distant place the whole of the Tristram story. It would have been far better to have omitted it altogether, and to have told, for the second part of this Idyll, the history of the last meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere, of the treachery of Modred, and of the flight of Guinevere, which at present is told in the Idyll of *Guinevere*. These belong to this Idyll properly, for when Arthur returns from his expedition to the north, he finds Guinevere gone. Then too, the expedition to the north could be told in its proper place. Tennyson would not have been obliged to drag it in, like a belated recollection, in the middle of Tristram's fide through the forest. These then, are the unfortunate things into which the ethical direction of a work of art, when it is primary and not secondary, forces an artist.

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The description of Arthur's expedition is the one excellent thing in this Idyll. It has the keenest sight of the things described, and it sets Arthur forth, as he ought to be at this time, in heroic proportions. We see then, the unstained, the majestic king, midst of a stained and degraded world, faithful alone among the faithless. We see also the wild northern land near the sea, the black and lonely tower among the marshes; and they are painted with undiminished vividness and strength.

He dream'd; but Arthur with a hundred spears
Rode far, till o'er the illimitable reed,
And many a glancing splash and sallowy isle,
The wide-wing'd sunset of the misty marsh
Glared on a huge machicolated tower
That stood with open doors, whereout was roll'd
A roar of riot.

One of the knights of the Round Table has been hung near the gate on a dead tree, and beside him hangs a horn. And Arthur blew the horn—

Then at the dry harsh roar of the great horn,
That sent the face of all the marsh aloft
An ever upward-rushing storm and cloud
Of shriek and plume—

a splendid description of the host of water-birds rising startled from the marsh—the felon knight comes forth, and before the mighty presence of the king, not a blow stricken, fell—

as the crest of some slow-arching wave,
Heard in dead night along that table-shore,
Drops flat, and after the great waters break
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,

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Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud
From less and less to nothing; thus he fell.

This, with the illimitable reed and the wide-winged sunset over glancing plash and sallowy isle, is a magnificent description of Nature. Every adjective in it is superbly chosen; but not less magnificent is the last vision of the flaming tower reddening all the meres and the sea beyond:

Which half that autumn night, like the live North,
Red-pulsing up thro' Alioth and Alcor,
Made all above it, and a hundred meres
About it, as the water Moab saw
Come round by the east, and out beyond them flush'd
The long low dune and lazy-plunging sea.

Lancelot, of all the male characters in the *Idylls of the King*, is the least troubled by the allegory. He is so un-allegorical that when he is present with the other characters, at those times when they are allegorical, he confuses their symbolism, or materialises them into real personages. He often seems like a man among ghosts. His tale is modernised, but not so flagrantly modernised as that of the rest. We might sometimes mistake him for the Lancelot of Malory.

But though not allegorical, he is ethical, and, in this sphere, he is entirely modernised. The moral teaching embodied in him and his relation to Guinevere and Arthur, gathers round the question of faithfulness and unfaithfulness in love and marriage. Of the three, Lancelot is again the most actual, if I may use that word in this manner. But he is actual as a gentleman of our own time, not as the romance knights of the thirteenth century, or of the book of Malory. They had a totally different code of

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honour in their love-matters from that which rules our social conscience.

It is quite allowable in art to re-create the characters of an old tale, provided this re-creation ennobles the men and women as much as the original treatment, or awakens as much sympathy for them. The old story gathers our affections in one fashion round Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot. Tennyson does it in another way altogether—in the ethical, not in the romantic way. He was justified in this if his form was good. But he keeps so much of the romantic story that he forces us to mix up his Lancelot with the ancient Lancelot, and the two clash in our minds. Again and again their unfittedness each to each, the irreconcilability of their atmospheres, disturbs the reader of the *Idylls*. It is difficult to keep them apart, yet to read the poem with justice to Tennyson we must do this difficult thing. We must ignore the Lancelot of the Romances, when at the same time we are continually reminded of him.

Outside of this criticism which has only to do with the form of the tale, Tennyson's conception and drawing of Lancelot are full of power. He is Arthur's earliest and dearest friend. He and Arthur swear undying fealty to one another on the field of battle. On Lancelot's steadiness in this, since he is the greatest of the knights and has the largest clan, depend half the strength and enduringness of the Round Table. He has himself an unbroken admiration for the King, and pays him undiminished honour and affection from the beginning to the end. He never wavers in this faithfulness, which is the root of his character. So he is represented in the old story, and so Tennyson represents him.

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But at one point, not in romantic eyes but in ours, he is unfaithful to Arthur. He loves Guinevere and takes away her love from the King. There is a certain inevitableness in this love, for which Tennyson allows, while he condemns the love. And there is an absolute faithfulness in it on both sides which keeps the characters noble, while the thing itself is represented as not noble. Lancelot, the lover, is as constant to Guinevere, as Lancelot, the friend, is to the King. But it is in this double faithfulness that the pain and the punishment of life inhere—faithful to Arthur, but unfaithful at the dearest point; faithful to Guinevere, but making her unfaithful at that central point of life in which the fate of her husband, of his work, and of his kingdom is contained.

This is a tragic position. It cannot be called tragic in the Romances, for in the chivalric circles of the romantic centuries Lancelot's love of the Queen did not altogether clash, in men's minds, with his fidelity to Arthur. But Tennyson, making the first element in the situation Lancelot's profound constancy (he cannot love the King less, he cannot love the Queen less), wraps Lancelot up in the moral atmosphere which, in our century as in others, surrounds the marriage tie, and the situation is at once ethically tragic. Lancelot's fidelity to the King jars with his fidelity to Guinevere, and his life is rent to pieces between the two. Both are the deepest things in him, and both are at war in his heart; and the best piece of character-work in the *Idylls* is the slow delineation of this intimate and tormented strife. He is true to the King and true to the Queen, but his truth to the King makes him shrink

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from the Queen, and his truth to the Queen makes him shrink from the King. Tennyson puts this terrible position—terrible to the character he represents Lancelot to be—in the two well-known lines—

His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

The battle in his soul comes to a crisis in the Idyll of *Lancelot and Elaine*. Arthur asks Lancelot if he will come to the jousts for the Diamond. "No," he replies, for he thinks the Queen wishes him to stay with her. "To blame, my Lord Lancelot," the Queen says, when Arthur is gone. "You must go; our knights and the crowd will murmur if you stay." "Are you so wise, my Queen?" answers Lancelot, vexed that he must seem to have lied to the King, "once it was not so." But he obeys, and on his way to the jousts he meets Elaine, who loves him, and who, being unloved by him, dies of her love. The Queen is jealous, and her suspicion makes Lancelot realise the restlessness and misery of a life which absolute trust between him and Guinevere can alone make endurable. Moreover, he is wronged by her jealousy, and to be thus wronged in love by one we love, while it deepens love, makes it seem for the time contemptible. He is thought to be untrue when he is conscious he is most true. And he disdains love, life and all things.

Then the King is sorry that his knight is unable to love—why could he not love this maiden? And the unsuspectingness of the King makes Lancelot conscious of friendship failed and of honour lost. He is thought to be true when he knows he is most

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untrue. This is a double torture, and it is finely wrought out by Tennyson. It comes to a point of self-knowledge and self-abasement in his soliloquy, when, leaving the Queen wrathful, and Arthur sorrowing and surprised, and the girl who loved and died for him in her grave, he sits thinking by the river, and wishes that his life had never been. The lines in which he analyses his inmost soul are equally plain and subtle, full of that curious truth with which a man, embittered for the moment, views himself; and as concentrated as if they had been done by Milton's intellectual force. Indeed, some of them are entirely in Milton's manner :

For what am I ? What profits it my name
Of greatest knight ? I fought for it and have it :
Pleasure to have it, none : to lose it, pain ;
Now grown a part of me : but what use in it ?
To make men worse by making my sin known ?
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great ?
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart ? I needs must break
These bonds that so defame me : not without
She wills it : would I, if she will'd it ? nay,
Who knows ? but if I would not, then may God,
I pray him, send a sudden Angel down
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.

It is the commonest cry of weakness in the unhappy hours of passion to ask the gods to work a miracle. But what the will does not will to do the gods leave alone.

And now remorse, envenomed by love's vexation, grew in the man ; and when the quest of the Holy Grail arose, Lancelot, thinking he might get rid of

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his sin, thinking the miracle had come—his love less dear to him for the moment, because the Queen had been unjust to him—said to himself: "If I can but see this Holy Thing, my sin may be plucked out of my heart." But while he strove, his love awoke again, for not from without but from within is passion quelled; and the strife so deepened that madness came upon him,

And whipt him into waste fields far away.

Afterwards, when he half saw the Holy Grail, it knew that his wrong love was dearer than his desire to be right, and it smote him down. Yet nobleness lived in him, and might have come to flower had he but willed to surrender his love. But how could he surrender it when the surrender meant misery to Guinevere? Was he not bound to be faithful to her, even if he perished for it eternally? And in that thought, which was of course half made up by his own desire, the personal wrong to Arthur, the still greater wrong to the kingdom and to society which his love was slowly accomplishing, became like vapours in the sun. He ceased to desire freedom from his guilt. And as in all the heat of his feeble remorse and of his search for the Grail, he had never willed, but only wished for righteousness, the failure of the spiritual excitement left him weaker than before, but less repentant. In *Pelleas and Ettarre*, the Idyll which succeeds the Holy Grail, he has wholly lost his remorse. He is at peace, and has given himself wholly to his love. These are the lines from *Pelleas and Ettarre*, in which we see the quiet content of accepted guilt:

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Not long thereafter from the city gates
Issued Sir Lancelot riding airily,
Warm with a gracious parting from the Queen,
Peace at his heart, and gazing at a star
And marvelling what it was.

But this peaceful pleasure in wrong, when all effort to overcome it is over, does not endure. Love in unrighteousness loses animation at last, and the pleasure of it passes into languor. In the Idyll of *The Last Tournament* Lancelot presides in Arthur's seat instead of the King, and all the world seems to him lifeless. He has lost all care, even for the laws of chivalry :

Sighing weariedly, as one
Who sits and gazes on a faded fire.
When all the goodlier guests are past away,
Sat their great umpire, looking o'er the lists.
He saw the laws that ruled the tournament
Broken, but spake not.

Nevertheless, long love, in spite of languor, holds him by a thousand ties to the Queen, till she herself, fearful of discovery, bids him go. But to the very close he is loveloyal, courteous, obedient to the woman whom he loved ; and when he leaves her he repents and dies. His faithfulness even in false love is reckoned to him for righteousness, or rather, when he ceases to violate his conscience, becomes a root of righteousness in him. This is Tennyson's ethical picture of this tragic situation, and it is done with great poetic insight into the human heart. Moreover (though it is charged throughout with a moral lesson) the artistic representation is, on the whole, the foremost thing.

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I may say the same, though not so strongly, of the representation of Guinevere. It is said that Tennyson intended her, in his allegory, to image forth the Heart (or what we mean by that term) in human nature. She certainly does not represent the infinite variety of the human affections. However, by falling short of the allegorical aim of the poet, she gains as a real person. She is a living woman, not an abstraction. But at the same time she is not an interesting woman. She represents a somewhat common type. Her intelligence is of the slightest, and her character has little variety. We infer that she had charm, but it does not appear in the *Idylls of the King*, save once when she talks with Gareth on the hillside. She is stately and lovely, courteous, eager to please, capable of a great passion, and, in this Idyll, of a great repentance; but this is nothing extraordinary. Such a woman may be found anywhere. There is nothing especially creative in Tennyson's conception. She is a Queen, but not a queen in poetry.

Young, she threw herself recklessly into her love. In after years she loved on, but with a prudence for which Lancelot half reproaches her. She admires her husband, but the reasons for which she admires him are, she thinks, reasons why she should not love him; and she is cool and still enough—in an hour when passion is in abeyance—to contrast him in Lancelot's presence with Lancelot; and to analyse why she came to love Lancelot more than Arthur, as if it were an intellectual inquiry. This, too, is essentially usual, and her passion has little to separate her from the rest of her sex into an individual

IDYLLS: GUINEVERE

interest, such as Browning could not have failed to give to her. The central passage of her delineation is in *Lancelot and Elaine*. Tennyson marks it as important, for he quotes a thought from it in the last speech of Guinevere after her parting from the King—that phrase about light and colour. Lancelot asks if Arthur has said aught.

She broke into a little scornful laugh :
" Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord—
But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven ?
He never spake word of reproach to me,
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,
He cares not for me ; only here to-day
There gleam'd a vague suspicion in his eyes :
Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him - else
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible,
To make them like himself : but, friend, to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all :
For who loves me must have a touch of earth ;
The low sun makes the colour : I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond."

She stands forth then—settled down in wrong, and thinking herself right. In the same Idyll jealousy comes upon her. In her jealousy she is still the ordinary woman. It is true that a woman does not show, while she is jealous, variety of character. Jealousy eats up all other feelings and interests. But if she be a woman of intellect, power, or variety, what she says in her jealousy—since it is said in the very hell of passion—will at least display shreds of these qualities. Guinevere is without them. That which Tennyson makes her say in the passage beginning

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It may be, I am quicker of belief
Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake,

has not sufficient strength for the situation. It may be that Tennyson desired to run the character on very simple lines, but, if so, the simplicity should have been either forcible or pathetic. It is neither : it is somewhat commonplace. It may be he thought that to keep her the great lady he was bound to subdue her to this moderated tone, under which she is supposed to veil her wrath. But the passion does not appear under the phrases—the tongues of flame do not lick upwards through the crust. It is worth while to read the scene between Cleopatra and the messenger who tells her that Anthony is married to Octavia, and contrast it with this passage of Tennyson's. Cleopatra is furious with jealousy ; she is the passion itself, but in the very heat of it ; what imagination, what power, what intellect dazzle from her like lightnings ! The myriad variety of the woman emerges through the dominant passion.

After this jealousy—being convinced that it was baseless—she, like Lancelot, settles down into the pleasant peacefulness of accepted wrong ; but as this peacefulness does not last with Lancelot, so it does not last with Guinevere, and Tennyson tells, and excellently, of the waking of her conscience. When the moral conduct of life, when the great sanctions of morality are to be represented, Tennyson impassionates them and lifts them into poetry. This is one of his greatest powers. He cannot draw the passions themselves or their working with the excellence of the great masters, but he does draw with

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a level power the moral exaltation which follows on noble passions nobly felt, or the moral depression which follows when they begin to feel themselves ignoble. Henceforth

the Powers that tend the soul,
To help it from the death that cannot die,
And save it even in extremes, began
To vex and plague her.

Grim faces and vague spiritual fears beset her as she lies awake at night beside the sleeping King. Or, if she sleep, she dreams

An awful dream : for then she seem'd to stand
On some vast plain before a setting sun,
And from the sun there swiftly made at her
A ghastly something, and its shadow flew
Before it, till it touch'd her, and she turn'd—
When lo! her own, that broadening from her feet,
And blackening, swallow'd all the land, and in it
Far cities burnt, and with a cry she woke.

And all this trouble grew, till she could bear no more, and bade Lancelot go. On the eve of their parting all is known. The shame outbreaks, and fills the court and land. Weeping, they ride away and sever, he to his castle, she to the convent of Almesbury, and all night long as she rode the spirits of the waste and weald moaned round her, and the raven, flying high,

Croak'd, and she thought, " He spies a field of death " —

for what her dream presaged was nigh at hand.

All this is told in the beginning of the Idyll of Guinevere, the story of which properly opens at her coming to Almesbury, where she lives, no one knowing who she is, and is waited on by a young

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and innocent novice. She is alone with her past love and with her sin, and sometimes the soft memory of the one is with her, and sometimes the grim presence of the other. Her repentance is not full as yet. She still regrets. The little novice talks of the wicked Queen, and urges that the King's grief is the greatest in all the land. "May I not grieve," Guinevere says, "with the grief of the whole realm?" "Yes," replies the little maid, "all women must grieve that it was a woman who wrought this confusion in the Table Round." "O maiden," answers the Queen, "what dost thou know of the great world?" And when the maid speaks further of Lancelot himself and his disloyalty, she can bear it no more. Lancelot is first with her still, and she breaks forth in sudden flush of wrathful heat, thinking that the child has been set on to do this by the Abbess. "Spy and traitress," she cries, "get thee hence!"

Then she is sorry for her anger. "'Tis my own guilt," she says, "that betrays itself;" whereat (in a subtle passage of self-deceiving) she argues whether she repents, and does the very thing the not doing of which she thinks is a proof of repentance—thinks again of Lancelot:

"But help me, heaven, for surely I repent.
For what is true repentance but in thought—
Not ev'n in inmost thought to think again
The sins that made the past so pleasant to us;
And I have sworn never to see him more,
To see him more!"

And ev'n in saying this,
Her memory from old habit of the mind
Went slipping back upon the golden days
In which she saw him first.

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She paints that happy time in a beautiful recalling,
her long ride with Lancelot to meet the King, then
the meeting with Arthur, and how she

sigh'd to find
Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,
High, self-contain'd, and passionless, not like him,
"Not like my Lancelot!"

This is not repentance. It is the cherishing of ancient joy. "She grew half-guilty in her thoughts again." At this very moment of crisis in the inward life the King rides to the convent door.

It is well conceived by Tennyson; and Guinevere, hearing the King's step, falls prostrate on the floor, and a voice speaks to her:

Monotonous and hollow like a ghost's
Denouncing judgment, but, tho' changed, the King's.

We know that speech of Arthur's, spoken by one who was going to his death, and having to the woman's ears the weight and truth of dying words. It tells her of her sin and the destruction she has wrought, and sternly:

The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea.

But it also tells her that he loves her still, that he will urge her crimes no more, that he forgives as Eternal God forgives. He will not touch her here on earth, but in the world where all are pure she will understand at last, and claim him, not Lancelot, as her true love. Farewell, he says, and he bends to bless her.

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And this breaks down the woman's long love for another, and at last she loves Arthur! When she loves him she repents, but not till then. Guinevere is the ordinary woman. A strong-hearted woman, in whom either conscience or intellect was powerful, would have repented without loving Arthur, or not repented at all; but this type of woman does not really repent of a sin of this kind till she loses love for one, and finds herself loving another. Guinevere at last loves Arthur, and then she has a horror of herself—but, since she loves afresh, she is upborne on this new delight, and, forgetting the past, looks forward to be Arthur's mate in heaven. That also is characteristic of this ordinary type. Her love saves her, and she passes into good deeds and ministrant power, and in the end, being Abbess as she has been Queen, she died and went—

To where beyond these voices there is peace.

Passing from Guinevere to the poem itself, it is necessary to repeat that it is entirely modern in form, feeling, and thought. There is not a trace in the Romances of its moralities, of its view of the relations between Arthur and Guinevere and Lancelot, of Arthur's feeling in the matter; of its strict sense of sin and of repentance, of its careful insistence on the results of Guinevere's wrong on her inner life, of a single one of the motives used by Arthur in his last address to Guinevere.* If we

* It is true that, in Malory's book, Arthur in his fury condemns Guinevere to the stake, and would "shamefully slay" Sir Lancelot; but it is more because their crime was treason than immorality. Arthur is miserable, not because Guinevere has been false, but because he has lost Sir Lancelot, the support of the Round Table. He regrets that he was told of the

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wish them to live in this poem, to feel and understand Tennyson's work, we must put ourselves out of the romantic society and into the social and ethical position that he occupies. To find the power and beauty of any poem, we must breathe for the time the air the poet breathes.

Some, however, attack this poem because of this ethical direction; and there are places certainly where the ethical aim is made too prominent. But, after all, the artistic direction is here the dominant direction, and the ethical issues, though clear, are subordinate. It is not just to say that they override

matter. He goes to war with Lancelot, not so much to wreak his private wrong as to satisfy Sir Gawaine, whose brothers Lancelot has slain. "Alas," he cries, "that ever this war was begun." He bursts into tears of sorrow, thinking on Lancelot's great courtesy when Lancelot horses him in a battle. He falls sick with sorrow. "My lord King Arthur," says one of his knights, "would love Sir Lancelot, but Sir Gawaine will not suffer him." There is nothing in the original story of Arthur's moral indignation in the *Idylls*. That passage in Tennyson where Arthur says that he holds the man the worst of public foes who lets the wife he knows to be false abide with him and rule his house, is utterly at variance with the sentiment of the original. Arthur is there anxious to have Guinevere back, and does receive her back with honour. Moreover, society and the Church in the story differ altogether from Tennyson on this point. When the Pope hears of the war—"he considering the great goodness of King Arthur and Sir Lancelot, the most noble Knight of the world, called to him a noble clerk that at that time was there present, which was the Bishop of Rochester, And the Pope gave him bulls, under seal, charging him, upon pain of interdicting all England, that he take his Queen, dame Guinevere, to him again, and accord with Sir Lancelot"—which Arthur gladly does, receiving Guinevere from the hands of Lancelot; but is driven by Gawaine to banish Lancelot, to his great sorrow. So the Head of the Church and an English bishop—and all society agrees with them—intervene to do that very thing which Tennyson's Arthur declares is deadly to public morality.

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this Idyll ; and it seems to me that the real thing these objectors dislike is his view of the relation between man and wife. To criticise the poem from the ground of that dislike has no weight as art-criticism. Moreover, Tennyson really felt passionately on this matter, and this strong emotion of his lifts the poem out of ethics into art. We feel all the strength and intensity of his nature in it ; personal feeling burns in it. There are places where the poem fails to keep its full power, not from any original want of deep feeling, but from spinning out the emotion into too fine a thread. But on the whole the poem preserves a steady level of moral passion which is almost unique in English poetry. Nevertheless, the ethical aim, by its very nature, and in spite of the poet, tries to get the upper hand, and when it succeeds in this, the poem instantly becomes troubled, and its power and beauty lose weight and fineness. It intrudes, for instance, into the most important passage of *Guinevere*, and injures the intensity and the effect of the last speech of the King. Tennyson makes Arthur, at a time when personal feeling should be supreme, turn aside to give a lecture on the subject of national purity, and of Guinevere's destruction of his work as a King. The King should have been dropped altogether and the man alone have spoken. I wish, if it be not impertinent to do so, that the whole of that passage beginning so like a sermon,

Bear with me for the last time while I show

and ending with

The mockery of my people and their bane,

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were, with the exception of a few lines, left out, and I wish also that the other passage, beginning

O golden hair, with which I used to play
Not knowing:

and ending,

So far, that my doom is, I love thee still,

were also expunged. It is too literal; it may be thought, but not expressed. I do not believe that the imagination would have permitted it, if it had not been half-blinded by the sermon that precedes it. Both passages are outside the situation: the first is too much in the cold, the second too much in the flesh.

As to literary criticism, this Idyll is one of the best in the book. I think its form, as I have already said, would have been better if all the beginning of it, which explains the reason of Guinevere's flight to Almesbury, had made part of the previous Idyll. We should then be wholly at Almesbury with the Queen, and there would be a clearer unity of place for the repose of the imagination. But, putting that aside, this Idyll makes a full unity of impression. We are wholly involved in the fate of Guinevere from the beginning to the end. Moreover, we are carried back by two episodes which concern her, one of which is told to her by the maiden, to her earlier and happier days. These do not confuse the impression of her sorrowful fate and presence. They heighten it by contrast. They bring her whole life into the narrow convent room and lay it at the feet of her pain, and our pity for the woman, and the moral impression of her story, are both deepened.

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These episodes are wrought out with great beauty : clearly invented, full of colour, life, and movement, imagined in the air of old Romance, and relieving the pity and sorrow of the piece with the charm of youthful love, and with the gaiety of the elfin world. We see through Guinevere's soft, regretful memory her ride with Lancelot from her father's castle in the sinless Maytime,

under groves that look'd a paradise
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
That seem'd the heavens upbreking thro' the earth—

and we think of Tennyson's earlier poem when as yet nothing but the thoughtless delight of their youth and love engaged his mind. The next moment we are borne from this glad beginning to the tragic end, and the Queen hears the step of Arthur on the stair. The same sharp contrast is made by the story the little maid tells of the elfin rapture of the land and all its throng of life, on the news of Guinevere's marriage with Arthur. This is a lovely tale of fairy gaiety, as youthful, as much enchanted in imagination, as if its writer were only five-and-twenty. The novice tells what her father saw.

He said
That as he rode, an hour or maybe twain
After the sunset, down the coast, he heard
Strange music, and he paused, and turning—there
-All down the lonely coast of Lyonesse,
Each with a beacon-star upon his head,
And with a wild sea-light about his feet,
He saw them—headland after headland flame—
Far on into the rich heart of the west :
And in the light the white mermaiden swam,
And strong man-breasted things stood from the sea,

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And sent a deep sea-voice thro' all the land,
To which the little elves of chasm and cleft
Made answer, sounding like a distant horn.

There is much more, and of equal life and charm and strength; and then, right over against this delightful flashing of fairyland in a conscience-less joy, is set the gloom and sorrow of the present, and the sympathy of Nature with it. The whole of Britain is covered with a pall of mist, the earth is cold and dark beneath it.

The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still.

Thus, while this happy story is told within, the vapour creeps on without, the symbol of the overwhelming of Arthur's work and life, and of the guilt of Guinevere. As Nature fitted herself to the rapture of the beginning, so she fits herself to the tragic end.

Moreover, this is done by the poet in preparation for the next Idyll, for the last dim battle in the west which is to be fought in 'the death-white vapour beside the moaning sea. Arthur is already folded in that mist; his work is drowned in it; and he fades away like a gray shadow, no man knowing whether he be dead or alive. Therefore in this Idyll we see the King through Guinevere's eyes make his departure in the mist—a noble picture, exalting the image of the King as warrior and as lord, and vividly drawn, as if by Rembrandt, in the torches and the convent door.

And lo, he sat on horseback at the door!
And near him the sad nuns with each a light
Stood, and he gave them charge about the Queen,

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To guard and foster her for evermore.
And while he spake to these his helm was lower'd,
To which for crest the golden dragon clung
Of Britain ; so she did not see the face,
Which then was as an angel's, but she saw,
Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship
Blaze, making all the night a stream of fire.

And even then he turn'd ; and more and more
The moony vapour rolling round the King,
Who seem'd the phantom of a giant in it,
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray
And grayer, till himself became as mist
Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.

That doom is told in *The Passing of Arthur*, but that he is already enwound by its misty pall, and himself a ghost in it, is nobly conceived, and as splendidly expressed.

The Passing of Arthur is set over against *The Coming of Arthur*, the epilogue over against the prologue. These two are not Idylls in Tennyson's idea. They are the framework in which the Idylls are contained, the coming and going of the great King whose character and life make the existence of all the other characters in the book ; whose fate, from its beginning to its end, makes the unity and the diversity of the book. In every Idyll, save two, Arthur is the master of the action of the piece or the final judge of what has been done ; or if not master or judge, the dominant figure to accomplish whose destiny the doings in the Idyll have occurred. Even in *Merlin and Vivien* and in *Pelleas and Ettarre*, he broods like a shadow over the events. We are forced to ask in the first what will happen to him and his

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work when he is deprived of his great councillor, the only one who knew his inmost soul; and Tennyson, with great skill, drives us into asking that question. In *Pelleas and Ettarre* enough is said of him to force us to realise the dreadful fate which overhangs his work. We see him there, like Abdiel among the rebel host, the only one who still loves the great Virtues and the pursuit of perfect duty in a world which loves vice as he loves virtue, and which worships the material as he worships the ideal life. He scarcely enters into the action of the piece, but he is, nevertheless, vividly present, standing in the background alone, wrapt in his fate as in a cloak.

This dominance of one central figure towards whom converges all the action as well as all the personages of the poem, is that which gives it unity, and supplies it with whatever epic character it has. The *Idylls of the King*, as a whole, borders on the epic; it is not an epic. Its form forbids us to call it by that name, and I suppose that Tennyson, feeling that, gave it the name of the *Idylls of the King*. Nevertheless, the idea of its becoming an epic was originally in his mind, and influenced his later work upon the whole poem. He hovered, that is, between two forms of his art, and this apparent changing, here and there as he wrote, of the class of poetry in which the work was placed, vaguely troubles the reader. That unity of specialised impression which should at once tell a reader to what kind of poetry the poem belongs, is not here.

Again, the proper end of an epic is the moral triumph of the hero over fate, over the attack of

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time, and over pain. He may be beaten into the dust, all but ruined by life; but his soul is not subdued. He emerges clear, like Arcturus after a night of storm, purified, almost equal in calm to the immortal Gods. Conquered without, he is conqueror within. Even Fate retires, saying: "This man is greater than I." Even the Furies become the Eumenides. In the true epic this is always the position of the hero at the close. It is the position of Adam, it is that of Dante, of Æneas, of Achilles. It is not altogether, only partly, the position of Arthur. He passes away, it is true, into the land beyond, tended by the Queens. There is a vague rumour that he will return, but no one knows. Ignorance, doubt, dimly lit at rare times by faith, enshroud his fate. His kingdom, he thinks, will reel back into the beast. This is not the true end, nor the feeling, of an epic hero.

Arthur's work has failed. Love, friendship, his ideal—have also broken down. That fate might belong to the epic hero, but that which could not, in an epic, belong to him, is the breaking down of Arthur's soul. He has no clear faith in moral victory, or in the Gods being, beyond our follies and our pain, the masters of right and love. Such was the faith of Ædipus at Colonus, in that Trilogy which is so near an epic in feeling. Such is the faith of Achilles, of Æneas, of Adam, in the great epics. The epic hero always issues forth from Hell, *a riveder le stelle*; and from his Purgatory, *puro e disposto a salire alle stelle*.

This faith does not pervade or close the Idylls. The steady belief of *In Memoriam* in the certainty of the end being good, and of the value, therefore, of all

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human effort, is gone from the *Idylls of the King*. I suppose that the sceptical trouble of the confused and wavering time during which the *Idylls* were written had now stolen into Tennyson. He did not become, judging from this poem alone, altogether a pessimist. He was too much of a prophet to be altogether that lifeless personage. But he drifted frequently towards that position, and then drifted back again. And the *Idylls of the King* represent this wavering between hope and despondency, between faith and unfaith in either God or man. Their writer, if we judge from this poem alone, and from the fate he allots allegorically to Arthur, did not know at this time where he was, nor what he believed, nor what he disbelieved, but, on the whole, flung himself at last on prayer. Even that conclusion belongs to the earlier poem. The beginning of *The Passing of Arthur* places Arthur in a condition which is best expressed by one line in *In Memoriam* :

And vaguely trust the larger hope.

I give the passage :

I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die
O me ! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is :
Perchance, because we see not to the close ; —

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For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain ;
And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast and is no more.
My God, Thou has forgotten me in my death :
Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.

Doubt, and all its trouble ! Unable to affirm or deny anything : No clear belief, no triumph of the soul ! And the last battle is fought in a death-white mist, not one ray of sunlight to illumine it ! Men know not friend from foe ; all ghosts look in on the fight ; every man who fought in it fought with his heart cold

With formless fear ; and ev'n on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.

I remember the years in which these lines were written, and the temper of society, and they describe that temper with a great imagination. It was a time when every belief was challenged, when society had almost ceased to hope or believe in the future even of man on the earth, and when political and social ideas which prophesied the advent of a more unselfish world were laughed at as unpractical. Moreover, those ideas were then only to be found in a vague form among the working classes, of whose life and hopes and struggle Tennyson knew nothing. Few then kept their faith, whether in God and Man, or in Man alone ; few were bold enough to believe that the confusion was not the prelude to decay but the turmoil that precedes a new birth, and Tennyson was not one of these. He was in one part of his nature, and judging from his poetry alone, too much the product of the Universities,

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too much in the society which is called cultured, too apart from the surgings of the people, too much in harbour—to be able in the midst of the confusion to see the great order, in the midst of the battle to be sure of the victory. At other times, and in another part of his nature, whenever he yielded himself wholly to the pure Muse within him, and did not bring his impulse to the tribunal of the understanding for criticism, he escapes into that land of faith where the sun shines on the glory which shall be, and, doubting no more, prophesies clear good; but this, which is true of the time when he wrote *In Memoriam*, and also of his old age, when the epic of his life closed in a hero's victory, is not true of the period when he wrote the beginning of *The Passing of Arthur*, nor indeed, as I think, of the whole of the period of the composition of the *Idylls of the King*. These were the days of his dim battle in the mist. And perhaps this trouble was all the worse for him, because the audacities, the reckless hopes, the faiths which believe without seeing, the keen contempt for any society which says "All is wrong or going wrong," or, "I cannot tell whether all is wrong or right," were not his dowry as a poet. Even when Arthur is carried away over the mere to Avalon, and when he cries back to Bedivere—in the part of the poem which was published in 1842—that prayer has power with God, he says :

For all my mind is clouded with a doubt.

I do not press that line, however, into my statement, for it may be merely a suggestion of the vagueness of Arthur's fate, of which we are left ignorant in

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the Romances; but it, with all the rest, fits in to prove the point with which I began and to which I now return, that Arthur is not an epic hero, and that his poem cannot be called an epic. Tennyson did not call it so, but others have. The epic hero must have a clear moral victory and be purified into clearness, and this is not the case with Arthur.

I turn now to Arthur himself as conceived by Tennyson. First, it must be understood that Tennyson's Arthur has even less to do with the Arthur of the Romances than his Lancelot has with the romantic Lancelot. The moral or even the social atmosphere of the Arthur of chivalry is not the atmosphere which Tennyson's Arthur breathes. Again I recur to the primal fault of form, which belongs to the whole poem. The Arthur in Tennyson's mind, and the Arthur of the romantic era, are linked together by an unnatural tie, and the two often quarrel. Most of the objections made against Arthur have their real root in this. They are objections rather against the form than against the poem. But, on the whole, Arthur as the modern gentleman, as the modern ruler of men, such a ruler as one of our Indian heroes on the frontier, is the main thing in Tennyson's mind, and his conception of such a man contains his ethical lesson to his countrymen.

As to Arthur the King, he is a man who has the power of sending his own soul into the soul of his followers, and making them his own—images of himself—and this is the power of a born ruler of men. It is the one-man power, that power of which Carlyle as well as Tennyson made too much—because

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the secret of the progress of mankind, a secret the true ruler should understand, does not lie in one great individuality devouring all other individualities and making them into his pattern, but in his so sacrificing his natural mastery as to develop into vividness the individual forces of all the characters he governs. Carlyle never saw that truth, nor Ruskin, nor Tennyson. But Tennyson, though he often preached this one-man theory, does not hold it fast. It seems to have crept into his mind—wavering hither and thither on many subjects during the years in which he wrote the *Idylls*—that this theory did not hold water in practice. For, though Arthur imposes his character at first on all his knights, they all glide away from him. Their separate individualities assert themselves, and assert themselves in reaction from the foreign, overmastering, and exalted personality of Arthur. In fact, Tennyson represents in the *Idylls*, whether consciously or not, the complete breaking down in practice of the theory of the heaven-born ruler who makes every one into his own pattern. I do not think he meant to give us this good democratic lesson, but he has given it.

Another part of the conception of Arthur as ruler, is that with which all the ethical writers, whether of history or fiction, have, during the last fifty years, made us familiar; and which many Englishmen, sent to our far dependencies, have illustrated by their lives. Arthur is the clearer of the waste places of the earth, the driver forth of the cruel beast and the lawless man, he who lets in the light and air, the doer of stern justice, the deliverer of the oppressed, the organiser of law and order,

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the welder together of all the forces of the kingdom into a compact body for right and against wrong, the builder of great cities and noble architecture, the teacher of agriculture, the maker of roads and water-ways, the Culture Hero, as the Folklorists would call him; and, finally, the great warrior who, though he does not excel the rest of his men in courage, excels them all as leader of the battle. On all this there is nothing particular to say. It is the general, the well-known conception.

The rest of the conception of Arthur as King is as the moral law-giver, and chiefly as the demandcr of chastity. It is on the breaking of the law of purity that he most insists to Guinevere as the cause of the ruin of his aims and of his Order. His knights may love—nay, nothing so well makes a man as the maiden passion for a maid. His knights may marry: life finds its crown in a true marriage. But only one maiden is to be loved, and wedded man and woman must live only for each other. And we have seen that this is Tennyson's opinion. All his poetry is full of it.

Yet, he makes the whole effort utterly break down, and I do not comprehend his position. I sometimes think that the hopelessness of the years in which he wrote the *Idylls* seized upon him, and he ceased for a time to believe in the victory of good. For it is not only the partial failure of purity of life which he represents in the *Idylls*; it is its complete overthrow. Every one, with the exception of Arthur, Percivale, his sister, and Sir Bors, becomes unchaste. I sometimes think that he wished to illustrate the truth that vows imposed from without were not only useless, when the character remained unchanged,

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but that they drove men and women into their opposites; and perhaps that his hatred of monkery influenced him further in this direction; but the astonishing result to which he comes is more than these motives should produce. Not a soul keeps the vows, except Arthur and those who have left the world for the cloister. I do not understand why he works out a result which seems not only to contradict the possibility of his rule of chastity being observed, but which makes that rule issue in a wholly shameless society. It is as if he despaired of purity. The thing he most insists on is made by him to be the impossible thing. This is an excessively curious conclusion for Tennyson to come to.

Every one in the *Idylls*, save the few I have mentioned, thinks this vow too much for mortal man. Merlin says that no one can keep it. Vivien and Mark, of course, laugh it to scorn. Guinevere declares it to be impossible, and Lancelot knows it. Gawain openly adopts unchastity. Pelleas says that the King has made his knights fools and liars; Tristram, that he himself had sworn but by the shell, that the strict vow snaps itself, that flesh and blood were sure to violate it.

Bind me to one? The wide world laughs at it.

Why does Tennyson, we wonder, make almost all his characters think chastity impossible?

Then, he even goes further. The condition of society in the court and country set forth in *Pelleas and Ettarre* and in *The Last Tournament* is incredibly bad. Every woman is unchaste and every man. Ettarre is as immoral as Tristram, and both far more

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so than they are in the original tales. Rome in its decadence, France under the Regent, were not so wholly evil as Arthur's court, with the sole exception of Arthur. The poet proves too much. Arthur's effort is too ghastly a failure. And the representation of this result—unless we fall back on the needs of the allegory for an explanation—is not in the interests of morality. Tennyson does not really—in this working out of his moral aim—strengthen the will to be chaste, but weakens it. The chief thing that appears is that chastity is an impossibility. Tennyson cannot, of course, have meant this; but his art ought to have saved him from the possibility of its inference. Had he been less ethical and less allegorical, he would not have fallen into this artistic error.

There are better things to say when we think of Tennyson's conception of Arthur as a man—as the "very perfect knight." We have a part of the character he meant to represent in the dedication to the *Idylls of the King*, where he compares his Arthur to Prince Albert.

And indeed he seems to me
Scarce other than my King's ideal knight,
"Who revered his conscience as his king;
Whose glory was, redressing human wrong;
Who spake no slander, no, nor listen'd to it;
Who loved one only, and who clave to her---"

But Arthur is more than that. He is not only faithful to his wife; he is as faithful in friendship as in love. Affection of any kind once given is always given. His chastity is as perfect as Galahad's within the bounds of marriage. His honour is unstained, and no passion of whatever force has

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power to make him waver from its call. His word, once passed, is passed for ever. He is so true that he cannot believe in untruthfulness, so faithful that he is unsuspicious of unfaithfulness. What is right and just to do he does, though all the world fall to ruin round him. His moral courage is as great as his physical courage. He can rise into a white heat of wrath or love; but he is not led away by false or fleeting heats of feeling into folly or intemperance. Add to this absolute courtesy, gentleness, pity, forgiveness for the fallen, unselfish joy in the fame and glory of others, and we see the perfect knight of Tennyson. It is confessedly an ideal, but an ideal to which the poet desired us to aspire, and to gain which he thought possible. This ideal has been the object of many critical attacks, or, to put it more justly, Arthur has been depreciated as a man with various mockeries. I need not particularise them. They have been about us for a long time in reviews, in society, among men and women who call themselves emancipated, and the question is: "Is there any truth at the bottom of this irritation against the character of Arthur?"

If the irritation be directed against those parts of his character on which I have now dwelt, against this ideal of a knight, then it is not only a false irritation, but it also speaks ill for the society which is afflicted by it. Tennyson has drawn in Arthur that which every man ought to wish to be. The qualities of Arthur would, when vital in our lives, make our society noble and loving, magnanimous and magnificent. The whole world ought to be better for this picture of a man, and the future will

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be grateful to Tennyson for it. On this side of the matter these critics are not to be trusted.

But is there no side on which Arthur fails, on which he makes a not quite human impression, a part of the picture in decrying which the critics have some reason? Yes, there is—but they have no cause to boast themselves of their acumen. What they say is not original. Tennyson himself has said it by the mouth of Guinevere, and it appears in the sayings of even the knights of Arthur—of Gawain and Tristram, much more in the sayings of Vivien and of Mark. There is scarcely a single attack made by the critics on Arthur which has not been made by Tennyson himself. In fact, Arthur is a little superhuman, a little too out of the world, a little too easily deceived, a little too good for human nature's daily food. Tennyson made him so, and deliberately. "Why?" we ask; "there was no need. He would have had even more force as an ideal character, even more influence on us, if he had shared more in our humanity. Why did Tennyson superhumanise him?"

The real reason lay in the necessities of that allegory which Tennyson chose to infiltrate into his poem. He represents Arthur as a man, and when he does so, even when he makes him ideal in conduct and aim, the character is just and clear and human. But he is forced by his allegory to paint him also as the rational soul, as an abstract idea, and whenever he does this Arthur steps outside of humanity, and that is naturally resented. At all the points where Arthur represents the soul alone, Guinevere and the critics are right. He does want colour and warmth, he is too much outside of the

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world; he is under-passioned, if I may coin a word; and the demands of his perfection do not sufficiently consider the weakness of human nature. He loses life, and becomes, in his allegorical form, the image only of a man. But because Tennyson was unfortunate enough as an artist to trouble his poem by making his chief character not only a man but an allegorical symbol, we have no right to transfer our impatience with the characteristics of the unhuman symbol to the ideal character of the man. Let us keep them separate. Nevertheless the artist ought not to have given us this trouble—ought not to have mixed up the man with the general notion of the soul of man. Arthur ought either to have been one thing or the other—either the rational Soul alone, or the man alone; not sometimes one and sometimes the other. And in this *Passing of Arthur* he is so much the man and so little of the Soul that he pleases more than elsewhere in the book. Even in the great speech to Guinevere in the last Idyll, the portions of it which are spoken by the King as the Soul in man contending with sense, lessen the humanity of those parts of it which are spoken from the man to the woman.

But here in this *Passing of Arthur* he is altogether the man, and he is dear to us throughout. He feels his failure ~~in~~ the great work he desired to do with the same self-pitifulness that many a high reformer has felt in the hour of his death. I have already quoted the lines. They are full of humanity. They are not the voice of an abstract soul. And their wild cry at the end:

My God, Thou hast forgotten me in my death !

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is changed suddenly, as many a prophet's has been changed, into a cry of trust concerning his personal fate.

Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.

'Then, like many another leader of men, he dreams on the day before he dies—and the ghost of Gawain, blown

Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling, "Hollow, hollow, all delight!
Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee."

And the shrill voice fades away, likened in a noble simile to

wild birds that change
Their season in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud;

and is imaginatively mingled with dim cries as of a city sacked at night, and Arthur wakes and thinks, like a poet, that all the Faery things that haunt the waste and wild mourn: for, when he goes, they too will go.

This also is human to the core, and when, mournfully saying that to fight against his people is to fight against himself, and that their death is a death-stroke to him, he feels the love of his youth recur and its late misery darken the whole world, so that the mist in which he moves is made less "by Nature than by his own sorrow for Guinevere:

This blind haze,

* * * * *
which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world,

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he is still more one with whom we can feel as man to man. Then comes that noble passage of the fight in the dead mist upon the ocean-shore, on the sunset bound of Lyonesse—in which the allegory recurs, but splendidly recurs, in veiled words which describe the whole battle of desperate humanity for life and faith and hope in the midst of its chill mystery—till with the falling night the North wind rose and the tide; the mist dissolved, and Arthur saw none alive around him but Bedivere and the traitor Modred. A great voice then shakes the world—a noble imagination of Tennyson—and seems to waste the realm, and to beat confusion into Arthur's heart:

I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.

This, too, may be allegory, but the human element in it is stronger than the allegorical, and it goes home to the heart of the situation. Afterwards, in one last act of kingship, when he slays the traitorous cause of all the woe, he passes for a moment out of his confusion into the full sense of his kingship, of who he is, and whence he has come, and whither he is going. This is the fate of a man and the heart of a man, and after all our ethics and allegory, it is sweet and true to company with it.

And then we enter into the old and beloved piece of poetry which we know so well—into the *Morte d'Arthur*, which we read first in 1842. It is led up to so well that we feel that the hand and heart that wrote it so many years ago have not failed in skill and the power to charm, that time has not robbed the poet of his lyre-playing. But when, being led up

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to it, we suddenly find ourselves in it, as in a land which of old we found lovely and rejoice to see again, we are full of our earlier happiness.

When first we read it, it seemed as if Romance, sitting ever young by her wild forest stream, were stretching out her arms, and bidding us leave this weary world for her delights. And when we read it again the ancient charm returns. For here, in this chivalric work, we are close throughout to the ancient tale. No allegory, no ethics, no rational Soul, no preaching symbolism, enter here, to dim, confuse, or spoil the story. Nothing is added which does not justly exalt the tale, and what is added is chiefly a greater fulness and breadth of humanity, a more lovely and supreme Nature, arranged at every point to enhance into keener life the human feelings of Arthur and his knight, to lift the ultimate hour of sorrow and of death into nobility. Arthur is borne to a chapel nigh the field—

A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land,
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

What a noble framework—and with what noble conciseness it is drawn? And Arthur bids Bedivere take Excalibur, and throw it into the mere. Twice he leaves the King to throw it, and twice he hides it, thinking it shame to deprive the world of so glorious a sword. All the landscape—than which nothing better has been invented by an English poet—lives from point to point as if Nature herself had created it; but even more alive than the landscape are the two human figures in it—Sir

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Bedivere standing by the great water, and Arthur lying wounded near the chapel, waiting for his knight. Take one passage, which to hear is to see the thing :

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

Twice he hides the sword, and when Arthur asks :
"What hast thou seen, what heard?" Bedivere
answers : *

I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag,

—lines so steeped in the loneliness of mountain tarns
that I never stand in solitude beside their waters but
I hear the verses in my heart. At the last he throws
it. The great brand

Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.

"So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur," and never

* The second answer is changed—

I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds. *

Both of them have the modern note, especially in the
adjectives; but though they lose simplicity, they gain
splendour. The words in Malory are ; " Syr, he sayd, I sawe
no thyng but the waters wappe and wawes wanne."

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yet in poetry did any sword, flung in the air, flash so superbly.

The rest of the natural description is equally alive, and the passage where the sound echoes the sense, and Bedivere, carrying Arthur, clangs as he moves among the icy rocks, is as clear a piece of ringing, smiting, clashing sound as any to be found in Tennyson :

Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he base
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels.

We hear all the changes on the vowel *a*—every sound of it used to give the impression—and then, in a moment, the verse runs into breadth, smoothness, and vastness: for Bedivere comes to the shore and sees the great water :

And on a sudden, lo! the level lake
And the long glories of the winter moon,

in which the vowel *o* in its changes is used as the vowel *a* has been used before. .

The questions and replies of Arthur and Bedivere, the reproaches of the King, the excuses of the knight, the sorrow and the final wrath of Arthur, are worthy of the landscape in which the poet has enshrined them. They are greater than the landscape, as they ought to be; and the dominance of the human element in the scene is a piece of noble artist-work. Arthur is royal to the close, and when he passes away with the weeping Queens across the mere, unlike the star of the tournament

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he was of old, he is still the King. Sir Bedivere, left alone on the freezing shore, hears the King give his last message to the world. It is a modern Christian who speaks, but the phrases do not sound out of harmony with that which might be in Romance. Moreover, the end of the saying is of Avilion or Avalon—of the old heathen Celtic place where the wounded are healed and the old made young.

Only then—with this recurrence to the ancient stories of the Irish land of youth, of the City of God to which Galahad went, and of the joy of the land where Ogier voyaged when the wars of earth were over—only then, and with enough dimness not to jar, the allegory steals back again. Arthur is again the Soul of Man that seeks the fair country whence it came. Sir Bedivere cries out:

‘ The King is gone.’
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
“ From the great deep to the great deep he goes.”

* * * * *

Then from the dawn it seemed there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

CHAPTER XI

ENOCH ARDEN AND THE SEA-POETRY

ENOCH ARDEN is one of a series of narrative poems by Tennyson, which have to do with ordinary human life in a simple and quiet manner. Some, like *Enoch Arden*, deal with the whole life-story of a few persons. Some, like *Aylmer's Field* and *The Gardener's Daughter*, tell the story of events in the midst of human life which lead to the misery or happiness of those involved in them. Some, like *The Brook* or *Love and Duty*, tell the events of a day in which lovers are reconciled, or part for ever ; and some, like *Sea Dreams*, tell of a sudden crisis coming on the life of men and women and making a crisis in the life of their soul. There are others, like *The Sisters*, but they may all be grouped as narrative poems written in blank verse, and we may call them idylls of daily life.

They stand apart by their form from the lyric poems which treat of the same human matters, but which naturally confine themselves to moments of life made intense by the passions. Their blank verse is of a special kind. It has a natural freedom and simplicity which is not permissible in heroic blank verse such as the poet used in the *Idylls of the King* or in the classical poems. Tennyson, who

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knew his art, is exceedingly strict about this difference. The blank verse of *Enoch Arden* is quite distinct, for example, from that used in *The Passing of Arthur*. A great deal might be said on this matter, but it belongs to a minuter criticism than is aimed at here, and, after all, his readers can hear the difference for themselves, if they possess an ear for poetry. If they do not, no explanation will do them any good.

This narrative poem of simple life is different from that class of poems of which Tennyson may be said to have been the inventor—short dialogues or narration of dialogues in blank verse between three or four well-bred persons on topics of social interest, such as *Audley Court*, *Walking to the Mail*, or *The Golden Year*—sometimes delightful, sometimes too pedestrian, half-serious, half-humorous things, but the humour coarse-grained; slowly-moving clouds of conversation touched here and there with the crimson of love. These things were wholly his own, and new; but the narrative poem of daily life among the poor, like *Enoch Arden*, was not new. We have it in the tales of Crabbe, and very plainly in that class of Wordsworth's poems of which *Michael* is the best representative. After Wordsworth, none of the greater poets took up this special subject or used its form of poetry. It is not made by Walter Scott, by Byron, Shelley, or Keats, Tennyson, who had a great deal of Wordsworth's simplicity and ruggedness, and also his power of seeing the deep things of human nature in the common life of man, saw the capabilities of this kind of subject, restored it to poetry, and enlarged its range and its variety in a way of which Wordsworth had no conception. He invented at least

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half a dozen new forms of it, but the form of which I now write is that in which *Enoch Arden* is written. It resembles that which Wordsworth used in *Michael*, but Tennyson began this class of poetry with *Dora*.

Dora seems absolutely simple, but it is not really so simple as *Michael*. It is, perhaps, a little too elaborately simple. When I say that Wordsworth's poems of this type are more simple than *Dora*, I mean that the style Wordsworth uses is more in harmony with the homespun matter. The style of *Michael* does not draw attention to itself and away from the subject. The style of *Dora*, in relation to its subject, is concise to a fault — so concise that it forces us to think of it as much as of the story. We are driven, in perhaps too critical a mood, to say: "The man who wrote this was not so full of the emotion of his tale as not to consider, somewhat too much, how briefly, with justice to poetry, he could put it. So far, he was losing emotion, and so far he has caused us, by compelling us to think of his conciseness, to lose emotion also."

Moreover, this extreme brevity of representation is quite unlike the way in which life is conducted by the class of which he writes. The men and women of this class live a delayed life. When their doings and sayings are so condensely given as they are in *Dora*, we are taken out of their atmosphere. Passion, it is true, at its height is brief, but the whole of life is not spent in passion; and there ought in poems of this kind to be something which should draw the movement out, and fill up the time between the outbursts of strong emotion. The slowness in such

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lives of the ebb and flow of circumstance ought to be impressed upon us. Even in the rapid rush of the *Iliad*, and even in heroic life, Homer takes care that there should be some delay. Though the similes he uses are so connected with the main movement by their fitness to the things they illustrate that swiftness is not lost, yet they also give us the sense that there is time to spare. They enable us to linger a little, even in the full tide of battle, as life lingers. Wordsworth hums along in *Michael*, as Michael himself and his wife hummed slowly on in life. And though the lover of conciseness, when he reads *Michael*, becomes somewhat indignant with Wordsworth, and though the poet himself seems sometimes dull, yet the story is deliberately told in this way by the artist in order that we may be kept in the mental climate of the shepherd-class of which he writes. Nor, indeed, at the end does he fail in the impression he wants to give. *Michael* remains a far more impressive thing than *Dora*. Wordsworth moves more closely in the life of which he speaks, and has lost himself in it, more than Tennyson. The question of style does not occur to him. The style of *Michael* is formed by the subject itself. I think that Tennyson felt something of what I have said, for it is plain that *Enoch Arden* is written in quite a different manner from *Dora*. It is concise, of course; Tennyson was always concise; but *Enoch Arden* is not over-concise. The action of the piece, and the movement of the feelings of the persons in it, are delayed. There is repetition, there is enough talking over events to make us understand that years and years pass by. The atmosphere of a remote seaside hamlet, and

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of its life from day to day, is fully preserved and felt. We do not think, as we do when we read *Dora*, of the style at all. It has come; it is exactly right; it has grown naturally out of the artist's profound feeling of his subject. Moreover, the verse is plain in sound, and takes pains to be like the talk of daily common life. It never rises into the heroic march save twice, once in the description of the tropic isle by day and night; and again, when Enoch looks in at the window and sees his home in which he has no share. Even the similes (in which a poet is allowed to soar a little) are restrained into simplicity. The things used in illustration belong to the same level of life to which the rest of the poem belongs. I quote two of them to show what I mean. Annie, wrapt in sorrow for Enoch's going, does not know of what he speaks :

Heard and not heard him ; as the village girl,
Who sets her pitcher underneath the spring,
Musing on him who used to fill it for her,
Hears and not hears, and lets it overflow.

That is one—a rustic picture and a rustic heart fixed in four lines; and this is another—born out of a sailor's life, and fitted in grave simplicity to the mighty relief of death :

For sure no gladlier does the stranded wreck
See thro' the gray skirts of a lifting squall
The boat that bears the hope of life approach
To save the life despair'd of, than he saw
Death dawning on him, and the close of all.

Such is the atmosphere.

There is not much of natural description in the

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poem. But Tennyson sets the scenery of the action in the first nine lines—

Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm , &c

They cannot be called a description of Nature. They make, as it were, the scenic background before which a drama is to be played, and this is all the poet intends them to represent. Two other scenes are laid, one where the wood feathers down to the hollow filled with hazels, where both Enoch and Philip tell their love to Annie ; and the other, the room in the cottage where we see Philip and Enoch's wife, and the garden without in the dark, whence Enoch looks through the window with a breaking heart. One other scene is set in the tropic isle where Enoch sits among the palms, gazing on the separating sea. This is the one distinct description of Nature in the poem, and, though it is good, it is not as good as another poet who sympathised more with that type of Nature would have made it. Tennyson, I have said, was out of his element when he was away from England. And this description, with which he seems to have taken great pains, is not fused together by any feeling for the Nature described ; there is no colour in it but scarlet ; and the one line in it which is first-rate might have been written in Cornwall from sight :

The league-long roller thundering on the reef.

It is instructive to compare its emotionless

* When I call these lines emotionless, I only mean that they are not thrilled with any affection for the scenery itself. They are full of another kind of emotion—of Enoch's misery.

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verses to those that follow, when Enoch in his hungry-hearted reverie sees in vision his native town, his native land. These are full of the very breath and passion of England :

The climbing street, the mill, the leafy lanes,
The peacock yew-tree and the lonely Hall,
The horse he drove, the boat he sold, the chill
November dawns and dewy-glooming downs,
The gentle shower, the smell of dying leaves,
And the low moan of leaden-colour'd seas.

Nor can I omit the exquisite sentiment which sighs through Enoch's first sight of England, when all the quintessence of his native land and of her natural scenery is wafted from the dim coast to the returning ship. In these visions of his country—for surely Tennyson himself is speaking here—he is unequalled in English poetry.

His fancy fled before the lazy wind
Returning, till beneath a clouded moon
He like a lover down thro' all his blood
Drew in the dewy meadowy morning-breath
Of England, blown across her ghostly wall.

As to the humanity of the poem, he that runs may read it. It also is kept at a quiet level, but it is none the less impressive. It never breaks into sensation ; not even when Enoch returns to see his wife married to another, and his children with another father. Nor has Tennyson any

of his hatred for the incessant and foreign beauty of the land and sea. And it may be that the faint praise I give them ought to be, in another aspect, the fullest praise possible. Perhaps the poet made them cold that he might express the weary anger of Enoch's heart.

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special ethical aim in what he writes. His work springs straight out of the situation. Enoch, Philip, Annie could not have acted otherwise—once we see their character. How easy it seems, as we read it, to do this well! How supremely difficult it is except for an artist who has loved his art for years!

It is with an art charged with humanity that the introduction to the poem prophesies the whole action of the poem by the play of the children on the beach. In the narrow cave the children keep house. Enoch was host one day, Philip the next, while Annie still was mistress. "This is my house, and this my little wife," cries Enoch. "Mine too," said Philip, "turn and turn about." And when they quarrelled,

The little wife would weep for company,
And pray them not to quarrel for her sake,
And say she would be little wife to both.

The childhood's play contains the fate of the men and the woman. This is well-shaped, skilful composition.

Step by step, on these simple lines, the story grows. The passage where Philip sees Enoch speak to Annie, and slips aside like a wounded life into the hollows of the wood, is beautiful, alike for the joy and the sorrow described in it, and for its simple gravity of style. Yet it is only one of many passages full of that quiet strength of emotion which belongs to lowly English life, and especially to those who live on the sea-board. We do not feel, at first reading of the poem—owing to its careful lowness of note—the force with which Tennyson has grasped

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the humanity of his subject, but we do feel a vague impression of it. Afterwards the vague impression becomes a conviction of extraordinary power. But of course the full humanity of the poem gathers round the return of Enoch to find his wife Philip's wife, and his own children Philip's children. And Tennyson, without transgressing his peaceful limit, is steadily equal to the central emotion of the tale.

As Enoch draws homeward to meet his tragedy, nature sympathises with him. The sea-haze shrouds the world in gray, the holt is withered, the robin pipes disconsolate. Thicker the drizzle grew, deeper the gloom. At last the town "flares on him in a mist-blotted light." He heard at the inn the doom which had happened to him, and stole out to look at his home in the sad November dark. And while he stood without the cottage, clothed in the gloom, he saw wife and children and friends happy in the genial light. It was difficult to describe the passion in the lonely man; it was still more difficult to keep him true to the highest in his character, to his staid and sacred sense of duty resting on love, in this terrible hour; but Tennyson does it with concentrated power. The poet is as nobly self-controlled as the character he draws.

Now when the dead man come to life beheld
His wife his wife no more, and saw the babe
Hers, yet not his, upon the father's knee,
And all the warmth, the peace, the happiness,
And his own children tall and beautiful,
And him, that other, reigning in his place,
Lord of his rights and of his children's love,—
Then he, tho' Miriam Lare had told him all,
Because things seen are mightier than things heard,
Stagger'd and shook, holding the branch, and fear'd

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To send abroad a shrill and terrible cry,
Which in one moment, like the blast of doom,
Would shatter all the happiness of the hearth.

The last three lines lift the description into the lofty tragic note. Nor is the close less nobly conceived. Enoch might have died a miserable man, shattered by his fate, and our pity for him been charged with a sorrowful contempt for human nature. But this is not in the bond. Like the epic hero, he conquers fate. The soul triumphs. He is more of the hero than Arthur :

He was not all unhappy. His resolve
Upbore him, and firm faith, and evermore
Prayer from a living source within the will,
And beating up thro' all the bitter world,
Like fountains of sweet water in the sea,
Kept him a living soul.

The whole of his self-sacrifice is accomplished, and at the end the poet uses splendidly a common legend of the sea-coast. He brings all the mighty Ocean into Enoch's chamber at the hour of death to glorify him with its sympathy. On the third night after he left his message for his people,

There came so loud a calling of the sea,
that he awoke and died.

This is Tennyson's one long poem about the poor, for Enoch is always a poor man. And it is characteristic of him that he chooses for his hero among the working classes one who belongs to the sea rather than the land, a fisherman and then a merchant sailor; for, next to his own sweet, soft English southern land, he loved the sea. He saw it day by day for a great part of his life

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from his home in the Isle of Wight. It dwelt in his observing imagination, and he knew, all along the coast, its moods and fantasies, its steadiness and its changes, its ways of thinking and feeling and acting, as a man knows his wife. But he loved it, not only for itself, but for the sake of the English folk that sailed upon it, whose audacity and constancy had made England the mistress of the Deep. He loved it also as a part of England and her Empire. Wherever over all the oceans Tennyson's imagination bore him, he felt that there, from tropic to pole and from pole to tropic, he was in England. His love of country and his love of the sea were fused into one passion :

Thine the myriad-rolling ocean, light and shadow
illimitable,
Thine the lands of lasting summer, many-blossoming
Paradises,
Thine the North and thine the South and thine the
battle-thunder of God.

So chanted the prophetesses in *Boadicea* concerning a future England with which they had but little national concern, but in reality Tennyson is singing in these splendid lines his own English folk and their glory; and I cannot finish this chapter better than by gathering together the greater part of what he says about English seamen and the English sea. It forms a special element in his work.

Enoch — to speak first of him — is the type of the "able seamen" of England, nourished in the fishing-smack, and then passing from land to land through the wonders of the waves in the merchant-vessel; and then, when wars arise, the

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mainstay of our navies—a type which has lasted more than a thousand years. Arden's godfearingness is not uncommon in English seamen, but his slow-established sense of duty is common; and so are also his sturdy endurance, his settled self-sacrifice for those ideas that his soul approves, his courage unconscious of itself, his silent love of his country—a careful, loving, and faithful picture, for which we have to honour the poet. Nowhere has he shown more convincingly the noblest side of his patriotism.

We have another type in Sir Richard Grenville, painted in that ringing and high-angered ballad—the fight of *The Revenge*. The soul of the Elizabethan age and of its great adventures, its hatred of Spain, its bold sea-captains who laughed the impossible to scorn, even the very ballad-music of the time, inform that ballad, which dashes along like the racing billows of the sea. Nor is the mystic element of the sea and ships absent from it in the end. *The Revenge* herself is alive, and does not desire to live when she has an alien crew.

And away she sail'd with her loss *and longed for her own*,

is a line of pure imagination. And the great ocean and the sky feel with the ship—they, too, are English; no English boat, they think, shall belong to Spain—and they bury *The Revenge* in the fathomless main by the island crags. This is a noble close to a ballad which, while the sea endures, the sea-wolves of England will love to hear.

The Sailor Boy enshrines another type; nay rather, it is a concentration into a short poem of the temper of all seamen in lands where the sea

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is loved. It holds in it the sailor's sense of the dangers of the deep, of the woes and weariness of his life, of his wonder that he can endure them, of his wish to stay on land, of his superstitious terror, of his lonely death in the homeless waves or on the cruel shore; and, as we read, we hear the long cry which began with the first poetry of England; and which Tennyson also placed on the lips of the Greeks, who were almost as eager seamen as the English:

Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.

* * * * *

We have had enough of action, and of motion we,
Roll'd to starboard, roll'd to larboard, when the surge was
seething free,
Where the wallowing monster spouted his foam-fountains in
the sea.

* * * * *

Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;
Oh rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.

But there is also in *The Sailor Boy* that fierce and keen attraction, that Siren-singing of the sea, as of beauty hiding horror in it, which, pulling at the hearts of English sailors, dragged them forth from their quiet hamlets under the cliff; whose voice drew Drake round the Horn and Frobisher to the Arctics, and a million hardy souls into every recess of the wide ocean, to live and die in adventure and in trading, in treasure-hunting and battle-hunting, in discovery, and in undying imagination. This also comes down to us from poetry more than a thousand years ago. Those who will read *The Seafarer*, a Northumbrian poem of the eighth or

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ninth century, will hear, through its strangely modern note, this double music of the sea, its two cries of repulsion and attraction which may perhaps mingle into one voice in that allurements of danger, which is more felt, I think, by seamen than by any other class of men. *The Sailor Boy* embodies all these elements of feeling. I refer my readers to it. To quote a part of it would spoil it; to quote the whole of it would not be fair.

Again and again this wild attraction of the Unknown in the deep sea is expressed by Tennyson. It breathes underneath the *Ulysses*. I have suffered greatly, cries Ulysses, and enjoyed greatly, on shore, and when

Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea——

* * * * *
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.

It lives in *The Voyage*, that delightful poem, with its double meaning, half of the life on the sea and half of the life of the soul, and wholly of those who, like seamen, have no care for business and science and the real world; who race after the undiscovered shore, who follow the gleam, who live for ideas, not for things. The same desire is at the root of the invention of Tennyson concerning the passing away of Galahad, who seeks the sacred and golden city, not on land, as in the original, but by sailing over the untravelled seas; and, finally, the full yearning of the seaman for the discovery of new lands after patient sailing on the huge wastes of ocean, and

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his rapture in the first sight of them, break forth in the true extravagance of the only entirely noble lines in the *Columbus* :

Who push'd his prows into the setting sun,
And made west east, and sail'd the Dragon's mouth,
And came upon the Mountain of the World,
And saw the rivers roll from Paradise.

As to the great creature herself, the Woman of our universe—the soft, cruel, reckless, restless, delightful and terrible mistress of the land—she lives in a changeful variety through the poetry of Tennyson, but she lives only on the coast. With his turn for truth, for writing only of what he had observed, he does not take us into the deep ocean, save in one stanza of *In Memoriam*, in *The Voyage*, and in a few scattered lines.* He rarely goes beyond the edge of the cliff or the margin of the beach. But he describes there the manners of the great waters with far more accuracy than any other of the bygone poets. His whole eyes were given to see truly and vividly, and all his imagination to record with joy, the doings of the billows on the land. It may be well to bring some of these together. Most of them are of the waves racing in upon the coast, and breaking on the cliffs or up the beach. The first of these I choose is in *The Lover's Tale*, and the manner of it is already Tennyson's own :

* Here is one noble passage of wave-tossing in fierce wind on the outer sea :

As a wild wave in the wide North Sea
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies, &c.

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The slowly ridging rollers on the cliffs
Clash'd, calling to each other.

"Deep calleth unto deep" saith the Psalm. This ridging of the billows is a favourite image, and he generally mingles it with the breaking down of the ridges into cataracts—a word he uses to suggest the roar and whiteness of the waters as they fall:

Tho' heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea
Drove like a cataract, and all the sand
Swept like a river. *The Holy Grail.*

* * * * *

And the hollow ocean-ridges roaring into cataracts.
Locksley Hall.

Those who have walked on the Lido near Venice, when a tempest was blowing, know what Tennyson meant by the sweeping river of the sand. The dry grains stream past in a continuous cloud, as thick as torrent rain. Another time he sees a different effect of wind over wet sand:

Crisp foam-flakes scud along the level sand
Torn from the fringe of spray.

He hears "the shingle grinding in the surge," and "the scream of a maddened beach dragged down by the wave;" but sees, with equal truth, the soft upcoming of the peaceful swell on the smooth, flat sand—"dappled dimplings of the wave;" or

the crisping ripples on the beach
And tender curving lines of creamy spray.

Or with the sad creatures in *Despair*, waits

Till the points of the foam in the dusk came playing
about our feet.

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He looks on a nobler, larger aspect of the waters
outspreading over distant shallow sands—when from
“the lazy-plunging sea”

the great waters break
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud.

Or, once more, he lies on the shore to watch

the curl'd white of the coming wave
Glass'd in the slippery sand before it breaks.

He has seen with no less force the wave breaking
on the cliffs, and heard its roar with a no less attentive
ear. Into the cove at Tintagil comes a ninth wave,
which,

gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame.

* * * * *

And the fringe
Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand
Lash'd at the wizard as he spake the word,
And all at once all round him rose in fire.

This splendid piece of phosphoric sea is matched
by the tidal-wave in *Sea Dreams* scaling the cliffs
and exploding in the caves. When a wave fills a
cave the compressed air bursts out like a clap of
thunder:

But while the two were sleeping, a full tide
Rose with ground-swell, which, on the foremost rocks
Touching, upjetted in spirits of wild sea-smoke,
And scaled in sheets of wasteful foam, and fell
In vast sea-cataracts—ever and anon
Dead claps of thunder from within the cliffs
Heard thro' the living roar.

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A similar thunder is recorded in *The Palace of Art*,
where the billows

 roar rock-thwarted under bellowing caves
 Beneath the windy wall.

Then he describes not only the noise, but the still
advance of the windless swell into and through the
cavern :

 As on a dull day in an ocean cave
 The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall
 In silence.

He does not often speak of the great calm. There
are the tropic lines in *Maud* :

 Half-lost in the liquid azure bloom of a crescent of sea,
 The silent sapphire-spangled marriage-ring of the land.

There is that passage in *Enoch Arden* where the
Pacific lies outspread and blazing in the sun, but
even that is made alive by

 The league-long roller thundering on the reef.

There are the lines in the *Princess*, where the
Prince sees in vision

 A full sea glazed with muffled moonlight, swell
 On some dark shore just seen that it was rich.

This is the only calm sea-moonlight I remember in
the poems. That lovely metaphor in *Maud* :

 If a hand as white
 As ocean-foam in the moon,

borders upon storm ; and so does the only other
moonlighted sea I can recall—a very jewel of truth
and imagination :

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A still salt pool, lock'd in with bars of sand,
Left on the shore; that hears all night
The plunging seas draw backward from the land
Their moon-led waters white.

And once at least we see, in a lovely verse of the poem to F. D. Maurice, the Channel and the ships :

Where, if below the milky steep
Some ship of battle slowly creep,
And on thro' zones of light and shadow
Glimmer away to the lonely deep.

One other sea-piece, amid all these collected aspects of observant truth, I myself saw realised. I used to think that the phrase "wrinkled sea," in the fragment called *The Eagle*, was too bold. But one day I stood on the edge of the cliff below Slieve League in Donegal. The cliff from which I looked down on the Atlantic was nine hundred feet in height. Beside me the giant slope of Slieve League plunged down from its summit for more than eighteen hundred feet. As I gazed down on the sea below which was calm in the shelter, for the wind blew off the land, the varying puffs that eddied in and out among the hollows and juttings of the cliffs covered the quiet surface with an infinite network of involved ripples. It was exactly Tennyson's wrinkled sea. Then, by huge good fortune, an eagle which built on one of the ledges of Slieve League flew out of his eyrie and poised, barking, on his wings; but in a moment fell precipitate, as their manner is, straight down a thousand feet to the sea. And I could not help crying out :

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

CHAPTER XII

AYLMER'S FIELD, SEA DREAMS, THE BROOK

AYLMER'S FIELD seems from one point of view to have been written as a contrast to *Enoch Arden*. *Enoch Arden* was a tale of humble life and of a fisherman's self-sacrifice. *Aylmer's Field* is a tale of a life on a higher social level, and of the other than self-sacrifices hag-ridden persons in it sometimes make. Enoch sacrificed himself for the sake of those he loved. Sir Aylmer sacrificed his daughter and his friend for the sake of his sickly pride. Enoch dies, Sir Aylmer dies, but the one leaves tenderness and happiness behind him and the other bitterness and desolation. The law of Love with its sanctions is embodied in these two quiet tales; is gathered round simple circumstances, and is woven in and out with common human passions made mean or exalted in various characters. The stories are set in carefully painted scenery, and are lit. and warmed by a steadily burning fire of imagination.

But though this doctrine of love arises from both poems (in one of which its fulfilment is shown and in the other its negation) the poems themselves cannot be accused of a conscious ethical aim. Their driving-power is not morality, but the love of

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human nature and the desire to make beautiful its outgoings. Moreover, if Tennyson had aimed at the truth that self-forgetfulness is the mother of Life and self-remembrance the mother of Death, he would still have done his work within an artist's sphere. For that truth is spiritual, not moral. Its doings belong to impulses of love arising freely from within, not to laws of conduct imposed from without. As such, it is a subject fitted for art, and the fact is that the impression made by both these poems is first and foremost an art-impression.

The next thing to say is that *Aylmer's Field* is not so good a piece of art as *Enoch Arden*. It is not much at unity with itself. It ranges too quickly from simplicity to sensationalism, and the sensational elements become more and more sensational. And Tennyson was entirely out of his element in this realm of writing. The sensational was not native to his character, and when an artist steps outside of his character into a kind of art for which he is naturally unfitted, he is sure to overstrain the effort he makes. The art of a flamboyant writer has its native limits, its native rules. When a writer who has nothing flamboyant (and I apologise for this term) in his nature, attempts that kind of literary architecture, he exceeds its limits and he breaks its rules. This is the case in *Aylmer's Field*. The dagger business is too like a novel. The wrath of Sir Aylmer when he drives out Leolin is more violent than even the weakness of his character permits. The sermon, though just possible, is quite improbable. The scene in the church is more than the poetic stage on which the tale is written is capable of bearing.⁹ The suicide is feebler than

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the hero, feeble as he is. In fact, the hero is too light a person to choose for a poem of this kind, but if he be chosen, he ought to be made more worthy of manhood, and of the girl he loves. He should have at least one parenthesis of strength in his life. It is not that the characters are out of nature, their conduct is fully possible. But from the point of view of art, they just overstep the edge of the natural—a little too violent, a little too solemn, a little too weak for their characters as drawn at the beginning, a little more extreme than the motives permit.

In *Enoch Arden* a strong character dominates the piece, and the prevalent overshadowing of this one character (even during his ten years of absence) binds the whole poem into unity. In *Aylmer's Field*, no character is dominant, and only circumstances connect the personages. The girl alone, and she passes through the action almost like a painted dream, leaves much impression on the heart. But separately, the portraiture is effective. Since the characters do not weave themselves together, we are the more forced to look at them apart from one another, like pictures on a wall. From that point of view they are full of interest, worthy of study, and realised here and there in single lines with a master's pencil. When it is said of Edith that she was—

bounteously made,
And yet so finely that a troublous touch
Thinn'd, or would seem to thin, her in a day,

we are made, in a word, to feel the girl through and through. Not less subtle and clean-edged are the

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portraits of Sir Aylmer, of his wife, of the Indian cousin who flashes in and out of the hall, of Leolin himself in his petulant love, his foaming wrath and his shrill suicide, of the parson prophesying against the world to relieve his own indignant misery, and of the parents smitten at last to the quick of their pride, and staggering home to die. These are admirable, but they would have been more admirable had they all been wrought together.

And the result, the emotional impression left behind by this work of art, is not of humanity rising above the fates of life by dint of love, but of humanity crushed by the fates of life because of self-thought. The impression we receive is one of human weakness and nothing else, and it belongs to every one of the characters. No doubt, an artist can feel such a subject, but is it worth his while to take it? It does not purify the imagination from fear of life, from contempt of humanity, or from petty anger with the common destinies of man. It does not set free high emotion. We are left in the common, not the exalted world, in the sphere of social ethics, not in the spiritual sphere of art.

I cannot help thinking that Tennyson was half-conscious of this, that he was not content with his piece, but did not like to surrender it, and therefore that he laboured on it, in order to use it, for a long time. There is an extraordinary excellence of workmanship in many parts of this poem, as if he had toiled by exquisiteness of technic to redeem its general failure. The description of Edith at the beginning, and that which Averill makes of her in his sermon at

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the close, touches her as if with a pencil of delicate sunshine.

For her fresh and innocent eyes
Had such a star of morning in their blue,
That all neglected places of the field
Broke into nature's music when they saw her.

And the rest is almost equal to that. Moreover, Tennyson has enshrined the story in lovely English scenery.

A land of hops and poppy-mingled corn,
Little about it stirring save a brook !

are lines not to be forgotten by Kentish men who love their county. This description also which follows is scarcely bettered in all his work, full as it is of long and meditative love of the cottages of England seen from the outside, garlanded with flowers, sleeping like sheep upon the green roadside—

For out beyond her lodges, where the brook
Vocal with here and there a silence, ran
By sallowy rims, arose the labourers' homes,

* * * * *

Her art, her hand, her counsel all had wrought
About them : here was one that, summer-blanch'd,
Was parcel-bearded with the traveller's joy
In autumn, parcel ivy-clad ; and here
The warm-blue breathings of a hidden hearth
Broke from a bower of vine and honeysuckle :
One look'd all rose-t'ee, and another wore
A close-set robe of jasmine sown with stars :
This had a rosy sea of gillyflowers
About it ; this, a milky-way on earth.
Like visions in the Northern dreamer's heavens,
A lily-avenue climbing to the doors ;
One, almost to the martin-haunted eaves
A summer burial deep in hollyhocks ;
Each, its own charm ; and Edith's everywhere.

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This picture, so careful in thought and sight, so skilful in words, and so full of light and flower-opulence, is worthy of the closest study; but even that, and the piteous and beautiful lines in which the agony of two young hearts and the wild weeping of the storm are woven together, do not redeem the whole.

So they talk'd,
Poor children, for their comfort : the wind blew ;
The rain of heaven, and their own bitter tears,
Tears, and the careless rain of heaven, mixt
Upon their faces, as they kiss'd each other
In darkness, and above them roar'd the pine.

Even these, and the last six lines of the poem, full of the life of Nature which lived the more when Aylmer's field was desolate of all the Aylmers, are not, lovely and true as they are, more than purple patches on a robe ill-woven.

I have also sometimes thought that Tennyson did not quite relish making an attack on the things he loved so well; on long descent and pictured ancestry, on that pride of name and lands and fitting wedlock, which the squires of England cherish. These things he loved, when they were not inhuman. When they made men and women inhuman, he denounced them as heartily as any Republican, for he was a poet, and Love with him was first. But when a man denounces the extremes of what he likes, he is liable to represent those extremes too darkly, to make them worse than they are, lest he should be thought to attack the real thing. And in this poem the representation is greatly exaggerated. What Sir Aylmer does is iniquitous, more because of the circumstances than

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because of his pride of birth and wealth. I do not believe that the Squire in the prologue of the Princess — “the great broad-shouldered genial Englishman” — would have yielded Lilia to the Parson's brother, with any patience, if she were his only daughter and the heiress of his lands. But Lilia's father would not have been a spy on his daughter, nor thought that she was his chattel; and he would have behaved like a gentleman, even when he dismissed Leolin. But he would have been as proud as Sir Aylmer, only in a more sensible way. It is not really pride of birth which Tennyson attacks, but things in the man which do not belong to a gentleman — ill-bred and dishonourable ways of acting — things which pride of ancestry would forbid another man to do. Tennyson's attack is not really levelled against the class or its qualities, but against a discreditable member of the class; not against rank and privilege or pride in them, but against the inhumanity, the meanness, the narrow conventions, which the diseased extreme of pride of birth produces and supports. It is not, to take another instance, Lady Clara Vere de Vere's pride of rank to which he objects, but the inhuman ways of her pride. Moreover, as a poet—whose heart, always moved by pure and lovely maidenhood, kept with great beauty and devotion his youthful ideal of womanhood untouched and un-reproved, and who shaped it in many sweet and lovely maids with a delicate tenderness never to be forgotten—Tennyson hated the tyranny of parents who sold their daughters, and *Aylmer's Field* and many another poem record his steady indignation with this iniquity

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Sea Dreams (which in the volume of 1864 follows *Aylmer's Field*) is not a narrative of years and of many characters, but of a single day in the life of a man and his wife, and of a crisis in their soul. The man is a city clerk who has been cheated of all his savings by a hypocrite; and who visits the seaside with his wife and infant after the loss has fallen upon him. They wander on the shore, and at evening the tide rises with a huge swell and thunder. The mighty sound flows through their sleep, and, with their circumstances, makes their dreams. The dreams stir their hearts—his to added bitterness, hers to solemn thought—and she asks her husband to forgive the injurer. "No," he cries. "No?" she answers; "yet the robber died to-day. I would you had forgiven." "Why," he replies, "because he is dead, should I forgive? Yet, for the child sleeps sweetly, and that you may happily sleep, I do forgive."

That is the little tale, but few poems in the work of Tennyson are done with a finer art, or built up with a nobler imagination. Moreover, the humanity, in both the senses of the word, is varied, vivid, wise and tender. The city clerk, gently born and bred; his wife, than whom Tennyson has scarcely drawn a more gracious woman—her grace the grace of Jesus Christ—the heated preacher who proclaims the overthrow of Babylon; the pious cheat, "so false he partly took himself for true," and the happy little child whose cradle rocks to the tune of a song that motherhood herself might have written—are all here, five distinct images of humanity. Each of them is touched by a poet's wisdom of life. When the hypocrite is

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met and challenged in the street, the clerk looks after him and

Among the honest shoulders of the crowd,
Read rascal in the motions of his back,
And scoundrel in the supple-sliding knee.*

But, scoundrel as he is, the heavenly pity of the woman leads us to pity him at the end.

Not less clear and delicate, in another kind, is this lovely picture where husband, wife and child are woven together into one love in the silence of the night.

Saying this,
The woman half turn'd round from him she loved,
Left him one hand, and reaching thro' the night
Her other, found (for it was close beside)
And half-embraced the basket cradle-head
With one soft arm, which, like the pliant bough
That moving moves the nest and nestling, sway'd
The cradle, while she sang this baby song—

The wisdom of love in the forgiveness of injury belongs to the other sense of the word humanity, and this humanity pleading for gentleness to wrongdoing is the one motive which makes the poetic unity of this poem. It swells into fulness, like the tide, from the beginning to the end of *Sea Dreams*. It is in the heart of the woman; its contrast is seen in the cruel preacher, its need in the death of the

* Mr. Woolner, talking one day about this poem, told me that when he was making his bust of Carlyle, a man well known on 'Change came in, and that, after he had gone away, Carlyle said, "That man is a rascal; I read it in the motions of his back a scoundrel; did you see his supple-sliding knee?" Woolner told this story to Tennyson, and Tennyson reproduced it in this happy way. Carlyle was right: the man, a few years afterwards, was guilty of felony.

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hypocrite, its victory in the forgiveness which the injured man bestows at last, its closing peace in the sweet sleep of husband, wife, and child. Correlative with this, and binding the poem into unity by its all-pervading presence from without, as forgiveness by its presence from within, is the fulness of the sea which everywhere inundates the poem, first seen by them as they walked

Lingering about the thymy promontories,
Till all the sails were darken'd in the west
And rosed in the east ;

then heard, and waking them from sleep, when the full tide rose, breaking on the cliffs and thundering in the caves ; and lastly, seen in imagination, full-watered, underneath the quiet stars. But before they had awakened, its solemn noise had entered the debateable land between slumber and waking, and made their dreams. The dreams are woven out of their story and the problem of life that belonged to it, but the sea is their creator and their explainer. Thus, from without, the Ocean Presence makes also the unity of the poem. The man dreams of life and honest work and of his speculation, in a beautiful invention through which the sea breathes and flows. But the wife, since her soul was in a higher land, dreamed a nobler dream, in which the vast tide, swelling with a spheric music, surges wave after wave on cliffs that in the vision take the form of huge cathedral fronts of every age, and breaks them down. Underneath, among their ruins, men and women wrangled ; but their "wildest wailing" (and this is a conception equally noble and beautiful) "were never out of

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tune" with the sweet low note which swelled and died and swelled again in the belt of luminous vapour, whence the billows rolled ashore to sweep the cathedral fronts away. Thus, below the wrangle of creeds, eternal Love abides, even in the hearts of unloving men. At last, only the Virgin and Child remain; and though they totter, they, like the love they represent, are not seen to fall. That dream, quaintly wrought as by the imagination working without the will, in sleep, is of the Ocean, worthy of the Ocean's soul, and worded like the Ocean's voice.

The passage is too long to quote, but there are few finer things in the literature of visions of the sea, save perhaps the dream of Wordsworth recorded in the fifth book of *The Prelude*. It would almost seem as if Tennyson had built his dream in rivalry of Wordsworth's; but sublime as it is, Wordsworth's is more sublime; and well composed as it is, Wordsworth's is better composed. The sea is also mighty in Wordsworth's vision, and the barren sands on which he fell asleep are changed into the great desert, over which the tide encroaches to overwhelm the world. The Arab rider in it is born out of Don Quixote, whose adventures the poet was reading, and the stone and the shell the Arab holds in his hand are two books, two great universes, of human power, for both of which Wordsworth had the highest reverence—the universe of geometric truth, and the universe of poetry—

The one that held acquaintance with the stars,
And wedded soul to soul in purest bond
Of reason, undisturbed by space or time ;

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The other that was a god, yea many gods,
Had voices more than all the winds, with power
To exhilarate the spirit, and to soothe
Through every clime, the heart of human kind.

Meanwhile, as the Arab rode to save these two books from the drowning of the world, and the poet kept pace with him, his countenance grew more disturbed—

And, looking backwards when he looked, mine eye
Saw, over half the wilderness diffused,
A bed of glittering light : I asked the cause :
"It is," said he, "the waters of the deep
Gathering upon us"; quickening then the pace
Of the unwieldy creature he bestrode,
He left me : I called after him aloud ;
He heeded not ; but, with his twofold charge
Still in his grasp, before me, full in view,
Went hurrying o'er the illimitable waste,
With the fleet waters of a drowning world
In chase of him ; whereat I waked in terror,
And saw the sea before me, and the book,
In which I had been reading, at my side.

Both dreams are raised into sublimity by the thoughts they represent, and both illustrate the powers of Wordsworth and Tennyson when they are writing at a high pitch of imaginative insight.

There are two other great sea-dreams in English poetry. One is the vision of Clarence, far the most splendid and passionate as poetry ; the other is the vision of the bottom of the great deep in the *Prometheus Unbound*—a magnificent enlargement of the dream of Clarence. But by weight of thought and height of aim, thrilled, as both of them are, by sympathy with the wants of mankind, the sea-dreams of Wordsworth and Tennyson are greater than Shelley's, and may even stand side by side

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with Shakspeare's, not by their poetic, but by their intellectual fire.

To return to Tennyson : this poem illustrates the range of his power. He passes easily from this large vision of the great deep of Eternal Love, destroying those impermanent forms of religion over which men quarrel, to the small and quiet picture, at the close, of the cradled infant and the mother. Few would dare to set them together, still fewer would have had the power to write both so perfectly.

We have a much fuller example of this variety of range in the poem of *The Brook*. It also is knit together into its brief space with delightful skill. Lawrence Aylmer, after twenty years of absence, returning from the East to see his native place, stays his steps at a stile, beside the babbling brook which joins the river near old Philip's farm. There, he remembers his younger brother, the poet who died, but who sang the rhyme of the brook he now recalls. There, too, he remembers Katie Willows, Philip's daughter, for whose petitioning grace of sweet seventeen he endured old Philip's chatter for many hours, that she might have time to make up her quarrel with her lover James — till, returning, worn with talk, he found

the sun of sweet content
Re-risen in Katie's eyes, and all things well.

And then he thinks how all are gone—Philip dead ; his brother dead ; Katie and James away in Australia—and bows his head over the brook.

The story is thus happily and easily wrought, but the end shows even greater skill. He lifts his

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eyes and sees Katie over again come to him along the path, and all the twenty years fade away. Amazed, and like one who half waking feels a glimmering strangeness in his dream, he cries—

“ Too happy, fresh and fair,
Too fresh and fair in our sad world's best bloom,
To be the ghost of one who bore your name
About these meadows, twenty years ago.”

“ Have you not heard?” said Katie, “ we came back,
We bought the farm we tenanted before.
And I so like her? so they said on board.”

And the daughter brings him in to be welcomed by the mother in the ancient farm. So does the poet bring the past and present into one, and leave the solitary man among old friends. It is an end imagined with much grace, and it brings the whole into a pretty unity. Moreover, as the sea, swelling through *Sea Dreams*, binds that poem, from without, into unity by its universal presence, so here the brook, glancing, glimmering and singing everywhere, runs through the poem and harmonises it and all the twenty years into one happy thing.

The form of the poem is built on one of those pleasant motives taken from simple things in the far past, the charm of which we do not feel at the time, but which, having been full of humanity, are enchanting to remembrance. We recall them, and are young again: the years of monotonous struggle glide away, and we love what we did, and what we were. And if by chance we recollect these events amid the same landscape in which they took place, the illusion, and all the emotion that attends it, are deepened — for Nature has not changed, and we seem for the

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moment as unchanged as Nature. So Lawrence Aylmer felt, seeing the same flowers as of old, hearing the brook make the same music. Again Katie tells him her story; again he sees James wading through the meadow; again he hears old Philip chattering in his ear; again he bids his brother farewell. Twenty years have vanished! How fair, how delightful life was long ago!

This is a frequent way of Tennyson's; tales told years after the event, and veiled in the dewy glimmer of memory. It was so he made *The Gardener's Daughter*, and *The Miller's Daughter*. It was so he sang *The Grandmother*. It was so he made one of the tenderest of his smaller poems, revisiting a place where he had known his friend, and weaving into his recollection, as in *The Brook*, the voice and the swiftness, the beauty and the colour of the waters of the earth. Who does not remember *In the Valley of Caunterets*, with its rhythm that flows with the flowing of the river?

All along the valley, stream that flashest white,
Deepening thy voice with the deepening of the night,
All along the valley, where thy waters flow,
I walk'd with one I loved two and thirty years ago.
All along the valley while I walk'd to-day,
The two and thirty years were a mist that rolls away;
For all along the valley, down thy rocky bed,
Thy living voice to me was as the voice of the dead,
And all along the valley, by rock and cave and tree,
The voice of the dead was a living voice to me.

There is yet a word to say about the grace of this poem, but I must not forget its portraiture. Here the portraits are all woven together by the feeling of the man who makes them. Lawrence Aylmer sees them all through his own character,

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and his individual emotion secures them into unity. But they could scarcely be better done. The young poet, his brother—who thought money a dead thing,

Yet himself could make
The thing that is not as the thing that is ;

who had only begun to feel his life, like that time which goes before the leaf,

When all the wood stands in a mist of green,
And nothing perfect ;

whose “primrose fancies” made the rippling song of the brook—could not be more briefly or more clearly sketched. Then we see Katie Willows, who never ran, but moved—

A little flutter'd, with her eyelids down,
Fresh apple-blossom, blushing for a boon.

* * * * *

Straight, but as lissome as a hazel wand ;
Her eyes a bashful azure, and her hair
In gloss and hue the chestnut, when the shell
Divides threefold to show the fruit within.

And with them both stands forth the English farmer, of whom Tennyson paints so many types. We hear with our very ears old Philip babbling of his stock, his dogs, of Sir Arthur's deer that in Darnley Chase

in copse and fern
Twinkled the innumerable ear and tail ;

“ of his colt and all its pedigree ; of his bargain with the bailiff, who in a line or two is flashed into life before us as clearly as the farmer. Then one final picture of Katie's daughter, coming with a low breath of tender air that makes tremble in the hedge

The fragile bint¹ weed-bells and briony rings,

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fills the frame with youthful freshness and re-creates the love-story at the beginning of the tale. All different, all excellent, these many portraits adorn and make alive this little poem.

Finally, no poem of this class is more graceful. It also is in a new style. I remember nothing like it. Only a double-natured man like Tennyson, delicate and rugged, could have written it. The farmer is done by the farmer in Tennyson; but when we lay him aside, all the rest is as graceful as the scenery. The music of the brook is everywhere. The music of pleasant human love is also everywhere. The poet-boy fills it with unworldliness. The girl is happy in it, and her youth and love make it like a summer day. And even were these gracious, pretty, light emotions gone, we could not resist the charm of the brook, that, coming from the tarn far away amongst the hills, and singing all the way, passes by Philip's farm to join the brimming river. We follow it, as if we walked with it from its fountains, by streets and town and bridge, by field and fallow; and the gay rhythm of the song dances with its chatter and glitters with its sun and shade. Nor does it want a momentary thought to give it some sympathy with humanity, some remembrance of us who company its waters with our fleeting joy and with our steady sorrow—

For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.

For, indeed, with all its sunny grace, there is also a little air of human sorrow, which, like a delicate mist, faintly sleeps above the poem, and softening its outlines, harmonises all.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

TENNYSON calls his *Locksley Hall, or Sixty Years After*, a "dramatic monologue," and it is a good name to give to a whole series of his poems, the "trick" of which I do not quite say he invented, but which he wrought into forms so specially his own, that they stand apart from work of a similar kind in other poets. Browning also made monologues of this kind. They, too, had their own qualities and manner, and were exceedingly various in metre. Browning's mind was filled with so great a crowd of various men and women, and of so many different times and countries, that he was forced, in order to realise their differences, into many different metrical movements. Tennyson, on the contrary, not conceiving so many types as Browning, is satisfied, on the whole, with one long, six-accented metre, with many trisyllables.

The dramatic monologues of Browning are sometimes lyrical, sometimes narrative, sometimes reflective, sometimes heroic, poetry. The poetic form in which Tennyson composed his monologues scarcely varies at all. It is an excellent manner for his purpose, and having found it, he clung to it. One man or woman speaks, telling a tale of the past or of the present.

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Another person—and here the dramatic element enters—is supposed to be near at hand, but we only know what he says by the speaker repeating a part of what he has heard and replying to it; and we only know of his presence by all that is said being addressed to him. The poor woman in *Rispa* speaks to her visitor; the *Northern Farmer* to his servant.

This is Tennyson's form of the dramatic monologue, and it is wrought out with great skill and effectiveness. It is an easy form to work in, the easiest of all; and it is characteristic of Tennyson's love of the simple that he should choose the easiest. The form being easy to write in, the work inevitably tends to become, in inartistic hands, slovenly, long-winded, and unforceful. In Tennyson's hands, on the contrary, it is of the most robust, careful, concentrated kind. It is extremely rare when anything weak intrudes, or when the edge of the meaning is not quite sharp and clear. Any failure in excellence is more due to certain elements in the subject, chiefly controversial, and which were better excluded, than to the work itself.

It must, however, be remembered that the power of writing a good dramatic monologue does not include the power of writing a good drama. I doubt very much whether even Shakspeare could have written a good dramatic monologue. He could not have kept to the single character. The pull in his soul towards the creation of more men and women would have been too much for him. On the other hand, the creator of a good dramatic monologue is not likely to be a good dramatist. Of course, he may have that power, but I remember

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no case of it. The habit of mind by which a poet creates, as in a dramatic monologue, one vivid personality out of himself is so totally different from the habit of creating a number of personalities, all of whom the dramatist conceives as apart from himself, that it is not probable one man will have both habits of mind. Moreover, the power of drawing one man in one set of circumstances is very different from the power of drawing a number of characters clashing together in circumstances which are continually changing. The writer of the dramatic monologue is likely to keep to his habit if he take to the drama, and all his characters will tend to express themselves in monologue. Changing circumstances will not modify their speech or their action as much as they ought to do. At root, all the characters will be the poet; we shall detect him everywhere; nor will there be enough distinction between the characters to make the play interesting, the action dramatic, the personages alive enough, or the catastrophe a necessity. This is true of all Tennyson's, and, in a lesser degree, of Browning's dramas. The Northern Farmer, the Northern Cobbler, the second Northern Farmer, the village wife in *The Entail*, are all keenly alive. But I do not believe that Tennyson could have brought these four into a drama, and driven them, by their characters hurtling together, to a necessary conclusion; or invented, with excellence, the mutual play which should lead to that conclusion. In this, the highest of all the creative forms of poetry, he would have broken down; and he always did break down when he tried. The fact is that, for drama, his own personality was too much with

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him; he could not get rid of it. But the great dramatist can divest himself of his personality. His personages have their own characters, not his. He has lost himself in making them. I might even say that his will does not order their action; it is rather the meeting of the various characters, under the circumstances, which makes the conclusion inevitable. He invents, it is true, the circumstances, but his personages do not act as he would act; they follow their separate bents; independent, as it were, of his will. And so apart from him are they, so little is he in them as a character, that I can conceive, to put it paradoxically, that he might be unaware of what they are going to do. The true dramatist sits outside of his characters.

This is the highest kind of creation. Such a creator is the true Prometheus. He makes men and women who are not himself. But this is not the kind of work Tennyson or Browning could do. We hear the individuality of their maker in all that the personages of their dramas say. We see the aims of their maker, his tricks of mental attitude, his theories of life, in all they do. The untrue dramatist sits inside of all his characters. Both Browning and Tennyson ought to have kept to dramatic monologue, or to such a variation of dramatic monologue as *Pippa Passes*, which no one can call a drama. All the same, it is necessary to say, though not here to dwell on, that Browning has made a far more successful attempt at drama than Tennyson.

Once more, in a drama the characters speak no more when the conclusion arrives. The dramatist therefore always looks to the future. He is anxious that his characters should play together towards a

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far-off end ; that every one of them should minister his own part to the end ; that each man's part should illuminate the parts of all the others. All his interests look forward. But in the dramatic monologue there is no forward look ; nothing has to be made for a distant end or fitted to it. What has been in the past or what is actually doing in the present is described, and to write of the past or the present is, of course, much easier than to compose a changing succession of events and varying emotions towards a close in the future. It needs twice the genius to write a good drama that it takes to write a good dramatic monologue ; but, unfortunately, those who have so much of the dramatic instinct as to be able to write a dramatic monologue persuade themselves with great rapidity that they can write a drama. It thoroughly disturbs me when I think what a series of little masterpieces of dramatic monologue we might have had if Tennyson had not spent so many years in writing dramas.

The "dramatic monologues," a few examples of which I select—since it is not possible to write of them all—belong directly to the tragedy and to the comedy of life. *Rispa*, *Despair*, *The First Quarrel*, are examples of the first. All the dialect poems are examples of the second. There is another class which can scarcely be called tragedy or comedy, the speaker in which reviews the whole of his life, or one event in it, and with a certain social or ethical direction. Of these *Locksley Hall*, or *Sixty Years After*, is one example, and *The Wreck* is another. Each of them also reveals and explains a typical character, but the individual is not lost in the generalisation. Tennyson's speakers are

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specialised enough to separate them from other persons of the same kind. The Northern Farmer, though he represents a class, is his own delightful self. When he died, he left no one behind who was exactly he, though he left a number of men who were like him. The general lines of the Northern Cobbler's position are the same as those of many reformed drinkers, but no one but himself could have set up the bottle in the window, or declared that he would take it with him after death, like a Norse warrior his sword, before the throne. We possess the type in these poems of Tennyson, but we have also the individual.

It would be wrong also not to speak of the variety and range of the characters represented. We pass from the aged squire, whose youth was full of fire and whose age is full of the ashes of that fire, to the woman who has forsaken husband and child and found a love which satisfied her soul, but whose love and life are wrecked. We stand on the sea-shore with the working man who has been driven by misery and false creeds into suicide, and sit by the bedside of the mother whose son was hanged, and whose awful love gathered and buried his bones. The seaman's wife, the bandit's bride, the Irish girl, the hospital nurse, the ruined girl and her merciful rival, the farmer, the cobbler, the sick child, the village gossip, are all created. Almost every class of society is laid under contribution in stories which range from the black tragedy of *Risjah* to the light comedy of *The Spinster's Sweet-arts*.

The first of these I choose is *Locksley Hall, or Sixty Years After*, and I connect it with the *Locksley*

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Hall which appeared in 1842. That poem stirred the whole of England into a new sensation. We can scarcely call it a "dramatic monologue," but it held this form of poetry within it, and went to its verge. We might even say that a dramatic movement is played in the hero's soul, in which three or four aspects of his nature take personality one after another, the lover, the betrayed lover, the curser of his time, the man who reacts with anger from his disillusion and his cursing, and the one man who is looking back on all the phases through which he has passed. In whatever aspect we see him, he is the young man. Youth flames throughout the poem; youth wandering on the shore, clinging to the present, dipping into the future, while he

Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that
would be;

youth breaking with the spring into love and into lovely imagining of love; youth raging at his sweetheart's falseness, at her husband, at society; youth remembering its "wild pulsation" before it entered into life; youth exaggerating its sorrow, yearning to burst away from convention; youth ashamed of its bluster, and emerging from it into resolution; youth flinging love to the winds and taking to science; youth bidding good-bye to the past, and devoting it to desolation and to tempest in a new rush of wrath; and finally going fiercely into the sea of manhood—with the roaring wind. For so it ends:

Howsoever these things be, a long farewell to Locksley
Hall!

Now for me the woods may wither, now for me the roof-
tree fall.

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Comes a vapour from the margin, blackening over heath
andholt,
Cramming all the blast before it, in its breast a thunder-
bolt.

Let it fall on Locksley Hall, with rain or hail, or fire or
snow;
For the mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and I go.

Was there ever anything more youthful? It touched everything that was young in England and gave it voice. The very scenery is full of the things which charm the young—the stars, the copses ringing with the birds, the colours deepening on their breast in spring; the curlew's cry; the stately ships going by on the sea; the roaring cataracts of the ocean ridges thundering on the sands; the vision of the tropics. 'Take the stars—a new, clear voice, unheard before, echoes in these lines—

Many a night from yonder ivied casement, ere I went to
rest,
Did I look on great Orion sloping slowly to the West.
Many a night I saw the Pleiads, rising thro' the mellow
shade,
Glitter like a swarm of fire flies tangled in a silver braid.

And yet, with all this efflorescence of youth, which in its very exaggeration makes the central excellence of the poem, a curious steadiness of thought and a restrained force of wording, such as belong to established manhood, pervade it also. There are many lines which have become household words, which, while young in their expression, have also the fulness of maturity,—and to write these and to know that one had written them along with all the youthful verse, must have given Tennyson the

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supreme consciousness that he was a poet who had a whole world before him; and he told England this in a single line—

Yearning for the large excitement that the coming years
would yield.

Sixty years pass by, and the young man is old, and Tennyson tells in a true dramatic monologue what the youth has become. It is a marvellous study to be written by a man over eighty years of age. He had now come to such years as "the many-wintered crow that leads the clanging rookery home"; but the poetic force in this poem has a constant volume. The rhythm is as fine as in the days long past. Here is one example—

Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she smiles,
Universal Ocean softly washing all her warless Isles

The poem is somewhat too long, but even that may have been the poet's intention. He had to represent age, and age is garrulous. And the image of old age is as clear and true in this *Locksley Hall* as the image of youth is in its predecessor. We might work out from the poem all the characteristics of an old man—from babbling anger to soft forgiveness, from many-passioned memory to pathetic expectation of the world to come. All is age, and an age which, even in its petulance and prejudice, is to be loved and honoured. The more I read the poem, the more I think it worthy of respect as a work of art.

Many, like myself, will dislike its views about man and the future of man. They are the views of a half-pessimist tempered by belief in immortality. But no one has at all the right to say that they are

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the views of Tennyson. He had created a certain type of character in the young man of the poem of 1842, and though he himself enters into this young man, it is only when he is expressing the general joy and impulsiveness of youth. The real representative of Tennyson in 1842 is the *Ulysses*, and Ulysses is wholly different from the old or the young man in both the *Locksley Halls*. Tennyson shows in the later poem into what the special character of the hero of the earlier poem was likely to grow after sixty years had fled away. It would not be just to affirm that he is painting himself, as some have said; the subject infers that he is creating another man.

The young man took to science to relieve his mind of love's disillusion. It is no wonder then that, given his temperament, he found himself in a sea of disappointment. He has not taken to work for man save on his estate; he has isolated himself with a wife and in his country-house, and he has continued to brood over the ills of the world at a distance from them. He remains as much locked up in himself as he was before. Had he had more sympathy with the movement of the world, he might have seen some good, even in the revolutionists and the jabberers. He himself, exactly as in his youth, does not refrain from noise as loud as that made by those whom he denounces.* He cries, like Carlyle, against mere speech, and sins, like Carlyle, by an overflow of language; sickening at the lawless din, unaware that his own din is even more lawless, and overwhelming his grandson with "Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chaos," and with all the wailing and screaming of the pessimists—a noise a thousand-

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fold worse for mankind, or for a man to make, than the noise of all the mob-orators of the world. It is precisely what the young fellow of the first *Locksley Hall* would grow into, if he lived apart from men and kept an edge of poetry in him—enough to make him shudder at all the evil of which he hears, but not enough to drive him into actual contention with it. This is tempered, as I said, by belief in immortality, and in evolution. The immortality will set the poor wretches of this cruel universe right in the world to come, but it holds out no present hope for this world. And evolution? Evolution has moved us into higher life with such an infinite slowness in the past that we can only expect a better world on earth, if we can dare to expect it at all, when æon after æon has passed away. At last, out of this crying of despair, mingled with the pathetic forgiveness and the pathetic memories of personal life, arises a hidden hope, at which, if he had wrought, he would not have come to so sorrowful an age—"Love will conquer at the last," and the poem ends with an excellent morality. But the man, we feel, will yet need to reverse himself in the world to come. It is a masterly study—a wonderful thing for Tennyson to have written at an age when most men are somewhat too inactive in mind to be able to pass out of themselves and for a time to enter into the soul of another.

The final question one asks about it is: Was it worth doing at all? Was it worth a poet's while to flood the world with all this wailing music, to depress mankind who is depressed enough, to picture so much ill and 'so little good, to fall into a

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commonplace realism, to seem to make the querulous hopelessness of the character he draws the measure of the future of mankind? It was not worth a poet's while; and I wish, in spite of the excellence of the work, that he had not taken the subject at all.

The next of these dramatic monologues I select as an example is *The Northern Farmer*. It is a vivid piece out of the great comedy of man, not of its mere mirth, but of that elemental humorousness of things which belongs to the lives of the brutes as well as to ourselves, that steady quaintness of the ancient earth and all who are born of her, which first made men smile, and which has enabled us to bear our pain better, and to love one another more, than might appear possible in a world where Nature generally seems to be doing her best to hurt us first, and then to kill us. This kind of elemental humour rarely emerges in the educated classes, except when we have scraped off all their conventions and got down to the rough grain of humanity, but is continually met in the peasant and farmer class; and, curiously enough, it was the only kind of true humour that Tennyson possessed. There was always in him, behind his delicate grace and educated charm, a piece of rugged, wild, uncultured human nature, such as might belong to a peasant—a portion of man just as he emerged from being a part of wild Nature—which often gave an extraordinary depth and force to the lovelier parts of his poetry, but which also enabled him to write these dialect poems in a way no other poet has approached.

The Northern Farmer is ~~the~~ the finest of them all.

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There never was a more superbly hewn piece of rough and vital sculpture. What Michael Angelo did for the Prophet Amos into whose writings entered the herdsman, Tennyson has done for this farmer, with a chisel as vivid and as bold. He is the very genius of ancient agriculture, and seems born out of the fruitful bosom of Mother Earth. He breathes and smells of the earth, and the earth speaks by his voice. When he tells how he stubbed Thurnaby waste and rumbled out of it the boggle and the stones together, and made grass of the bracken and whin, it is the lover of the Earth who tells us how she desires to be handled. When he says that God Almighty scarcely knows what He is doing when He takes him away, it is the rude Teuton tiller of the land who speaks, who ploughed the land with one hand and fought the Roman with the other, and who worshipped Thor, the farmer's friend. His first duty is to the land and then to the squire who owns it, and, that done, what has he to do with parsons? God Almighty knows that he has done, and none better, what he ought to do. He belongs to the ancient nobility of the plough and the spade, and he sickens to think of that base-born plutocrat, machinery, putting his nose into the blessed fields. What has been, ought to be for ever, and what has been is as old as the world. Men ought to cling to the ancient courses. Every night for forty year he's had his ale, and he will have it now, though he die. This is a primæval creature, and he is drawn, as a giant who happened to be a poet, might have drawn him before the Flood. It is a mighty piece of work.

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I pass over the others, and take the *Rizpah*. This brings us into noble tragedy—noble, not by its story, which is not of heroes, but noble by two things: by its dreadful pathos and by its infinite motherhood.

Flesh of my flesh was gone, but bone of my bone was left —
I stole them all from the lawyers—and you,— will you
call it a theft?—

My baby, the bones that had suck'd me, the bones that
had laughed and cried —

Theirs? O no! They are mine - not theirs—they had
moved in my side.

This is a cry out of the heart of all the mothers of the world of man from the beginning, nay, the cry of all the mother-beasts and birds before man was known on earth. All the tragedy of motherhood which has loved and lost is pressed into that verse, maddens and wails and loves through the whole poem. To find anything like the dark horror and untameable woe of *Rizpah*, we must go back to the wild Elizabethan dramatists, and to one higher than they. When I read the lines of Tennyson which bring together the passion of bereaved motherhood and the thin wailing of her boy's voice on the wind, the raging of the storm and the naked gibbet shrieking in the night, I think of Lear in the storm, when the coming madness of the old king, and the imitative madness of Edgar, and the elemental folly of the fool raised into a wildness of nature by the madness of the rest, are all matched and heightened by the roaring and flashing of the tempest over the barren moor.

Wailing, wailing, wailing, the wind over land and sea—
And Willy's voice in the wind, ' O mother, come out to me,'"

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Why should he call me to-night, when he knows that I
cannot go?

For the downs are as bright as day, and the full moon
stares at the snow.

We should be seen, my dear; they would spy us out of
the town.

The loud black nights for us, and the storm rushing over
the down,

When I cannot see my own hand, but am led by the
creak of the chain,

And grovel and grope for my son till I find myself
drenched with the rain.

This is the tragedy of Nature wedded to the
tragedy of a mother. Her only son is hanged in
chains and eaten by the ravens. The horror and the
shame, like ravens, eat her heart. Hung on the
coast, so high

That all the ships of the world could stare at him, passing by.

And the dreadful shame, struck into that splendid
line, and her unspeakable misery of love drove her
to madness. But when she was let out from her
cell "stupid and still," her mother's love was always
sane; and as the bones fell, she "gathered her baby
together":

Do you think I was scared by the bones? I kiss'd em, I
buried 'em all—

I can't dig deep, I am old—in the night by the church-
yard wall

My Willy 'ill rise up whole when the trumpet of judg-
ment 'ill sound,

But I charge you never to say that I laid him in holy ground.

And now she is come to die, and the "Lord who has
been with her in the dark" will make her happy
with her son—and a vast cry, the cry of her

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son's love, comes to her, shaking the walls, out of eternity :

But I cannot hear what you say for my Willy's voice in
the wind —

The snow and the sky so bright—he used but to call in
the dark,

And he calls to me now from the church and not from
the gibbet— for hark !

Nay—you can hear it yourself—it is coming—shaking
the walls—

Willy—the moon's in a cloud—Good-night I am going.
He calls

It was but a common hanging ; a common thief, and
an old wife mad with grief, an every-day thing !
But a great poet came by, and we have this—the
depths of sorrow, the depths of love, infinite pity,
infinite motherhood, a world on a world.

CHAPTER XIV

SPECULATIVE THEOLOGY

THE later poems of Tennyson are full of speculative theology, and of an interesting kind ; that kind which not only reveals character, but also opens out those more uncommon regions of the mind where life and character combining have produced strange gardens of thought. The poet does not move here in the moral world, or as the emotional imager of life, or as the builder of tales by the harp of imagination ; but in the world beyond the senses, where things are felt and thought, not seen and proved ; in the great deeps of passionate conjecture. And what he thinks there, and how he feels in that spaceless and timeless country, unveil to us some of the secret places of his character.

I have used the word "passionate" above, because, unless such speculations are warmed by fire from the heart, they are not fit subjects for poetry. Tennyson's speculative subjects,—such as *Where was the soul before its birth?*—take their rise always from the cries of love within him for satisfaction, and, since they come from that source, their treatment by him is always poetical. I have also used the word "conjecture" above, in order to distinguish these subjects from others which he did not regard

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as matters of speculation, but of faith. Tennyson believed in God and that God cared for men; and he naturally wrote with glowing warmth about One in whom he thus believed. I might quote many passages to prove this, but I quote only one. It is his great hymn, a solemn anthem rather, into which he drew all the thoughts and their attendant emotions which during his life and in his poems he had conceived, felt, and expressed concerning the Father of men:

I.

Hallowed be Thy name Halleluah!
Infinite Ideality!
Immeasurable Reality!
Infinite Personality!
Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluah!

II.

We feel we are nothing—for all is Thou and in Thee;
We feel we are something—that also has come from Thee;
We feel we are nothing—but Thou wilt help us to be.
Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluah!

This, then, is not matter of speculation to Tennyson; but, in what special ways, independent of an outward revelation, this mighty Spirit communicated Himself to the individual soul; and how He was connected with the universe of Nature—these were matters of conjecture, and the poet made many speculations concerning them. Then again, immortality (that is, the continuous consciousness of one's own personality after death) was a matter of faith to Tennyson. It was fully set forth in *In Memoriam*. It became troubled after that poem, as I have said; but his faith in it fought like a hero against armies of doubt. It

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finally settled down into absolute conviction. But in what way we were immortal; whether we were instantly alive and active after dissolution or slept for a time; whether we were still in connection with those we loved on earth; whether we moved onward in that new world as slowly as on earth; what our relation to the universe was after death; whether we returned in a new life to earth, losing memory but retaining our essential personality; whether we existed before we were born into this world, and if so, of what kind was that existence;—these and many others were matters of speculation.

The first of these is his conjecture with regard to the origin of the soul, that is, according to him, that essential part of infinite Being which, joined to the infant, becomes personal on earth. He assumes its existence; and he held, as a speculation, that it was in God before it took form on earth. Whether he adopted the further view that it was conscious then of a separate life, I cannot make out with any clearness from his poems. Sometimes it seems as if he did think this, but chiefly not. The soul was a part of God's life, but in that general life it had no self-consciousness. When a man was to be born, a part, a spark of the divine essence, was taken forth, as it were, out of the vast Deep of Spirit, and for the time of life on earth was enfolded in that which we call matter, with all its relative limitations, in order that this piece of immortal essence, the soul, might develop and realise a separate personality, understanding that he was himself, and always to be himself:

Eternal form shall still divide
The eternal soul from all beside.

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The new being learnt slowly the Me and the Not-me, learnt his personal apartness. The baby does not think that this is I :

But as he grows he gathers much
And learns the use of " I " and " Me " ;
And finds, " I am not what I see,
And other than the things I touch."

So rounds he to a separate mind
From whence clear memory many begin,
As thro' the frame that binds him in
His isolation grows defined.

The " use of blood and breath " is to outline personality. When the man dies, he has secured for ever a distinct being. The other faith— That we shall remerge ourselves in the general soul, is faith, he says, as vague as it is unsweet. The soul comes, then, out of the vast Deep of God and returns to it again.* It comes impersonal ; it returns to it a personality. This is his view. It is a common view, but in a great poet's hands it

* In *The Two Voices*, a poem of 1833, this speculation of pre-existence has already occupied his mind. The dark vague voice suggests that beginning implies ending. How do I know, the other voice within answers, that the first time I was, I was human, or that my life now is in truth my beginning? Life cycles round, and I may have been in another world before I came here, though I remember nothing of it. I may have been in nobler place, or in lower lives, and have forgotten all I was. Or I may have floated free as naked essence (and to this theory Tennyson finally clung), and then of course I should remember nothing of it. Whatever I may have been, there is something

That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—
Of something felt, like something here ;
Of something done, I know not where ;
Such as no language may declare.

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is expressed so imaginatively that it ceases to be common. In the epilogue to *In Memoriam*, when he is thinking about the child who will be born of the marriage he then celebrates in song, he says :

A soul shall draw from out the vast,
And strike his being into bounds.

In the *Idylls of the King*, Arthur is born, according to the body, of Uther and Ygerne, but the coming of the soul into him (and this is made more forcible by the allegory which makes Arthur symbolise the rational soul) is mystically represented by the babe who descends from heaven with the divine ship into the sea, and is washed to Merlin's feet by the wave. The two wizards, standing in Tintagil Cove,

Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks,
And gone as soon as seen.

A noble piece of symbolism ! When Merlin afterwards is asked about

The shining dragon and the naked child,
Descending in the glory of the seas,

he answers, laughing, in riddling triplets, the last lines of which are these—lines quoted again and again at every crisis of Arthur's life, and at his death :

Sun, rain, and sun ! *and where is he that knows ?*
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.

We know what Tennyson in this passage meant

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by the Great Deep from his poem *De Profundis*, written on the birth of his eldest son, and far the finest of his speculative poems. Its stately and mystic sublimity is warmed by the profound emotion of his fatherhood. It is divided into two parts—two greetings. Here is the beginning of it—and since Milton no more dignified lines have been written :

Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
Where all that was to be, in all that was,
Whirl'd for a million æons thro' the vast
Waste dawn of multitudinous-eddy light—
Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
Thro' all this changing world of changeless law,
And every phase of ever-heightening life,
And nine long months of antenatal gloom,
With this last moon, this crescent—her dark orb
Touch'd with earth's light—thou comest, darling boy ;

and then he prophesies the boy's life and the man's, till he joins the great deep again. The second greeting speaks first of the great deep itself.

Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
From that great deep, before our world begins,
Whereon the Spirit of God moves as He will—
Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
From that true world within the world we see,*

* Of this great deep of Spirit, knowledge but stirs the surface-shadow. It does not pierce into its depths :

The Abyss of all Abysses, beneath, within
The blue of sky and sea, the green of earth,
And in the million millionth of a grain,
Which cleft and cleft again for ever more,
And ever vanishing, never vanishes,
To me, my son, more mystic than myself,
Or even than the Nameless is to me.

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Whereof our world is but the bounding shore -
Out of the deep, Spirit, out of the deep,
With this ninth moon, that sends the hidden sun
Down yon dark sea, thou comest, darling boy.

And the Spirit is half-lost in its body which is its shadow, and yet is the sign and the cause of its becoming personal. It wails on entering the world, for it is banished; it knows mystery and doubt and pain and time and space, in its progress to self-consciousness. Yet that it might become a person was the intention of the infinite One who sent it out of Himself—

Who made thee unconceivably Thyself
Out of His whole World-self and all in all.

And the chief miracle is this, that the child grows into a separate will and character, knowing himself to be himself, and known by others to be himself—for ever different from all other souls—

With power on thine own act and on the world.

This is the main speculation. Within it arose two other questions which have always pervaded inquiry concerning the origin of the soul. The first is—Does the soul live over and over again in other forms on this earth, and, not carrying with it full memory of the past lives, yet carry with it the progress it has gained, or the retrogression it has made? There are two lines in this *De Profundis* which seem to suggest that this was a thought of Tennyson's:

and still depart
From death to death thro' life and life, and find
Nearer and ever nearer Him.

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And it was certainly his view that the spirit moved onwards hereafter :

From state to state the spirit walks.

But this does not say that the spirit returns to earth in another form. On the contrary, many passages appear to assert that personality, established here, moves onward, self-conscious, and with full memory, in the world to come, returning no more to earth. Tennyson did not, then, hold the Oriental or the Platonic view, which has been modified by a thousand speculators into a thousand forms.

The second question is—Has the soul, while shadowed and limited by sense, vague remembrances, as Plato or Wordsworth thought, of the diviner land whence it came, touches of what it was of old in God—at which touches the sensible world fades away, and man, suddenly swept into the supersensuous life, knows again his being in the Being of the infinite Spirit? The quotation already given from *The Two Voices* proves that Tennyson did suggest this in his youth, but in the later poems it was plainly stated. As age grew upon him, this speculation became more dear; and the passage in *The Ancient Sage* which best enshrines it is full of a personal interest. It records Tennyson's youthful experience, and looking back on this, from his old age, he explains what he believes the experience meant.

The young man who is with the ancient Sage represents unbelief in any life beyond the material, and his song cries out concerning man :

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O worms and maggots of to-day
Without their hope of wings!
Tho' some have gleams or so they say
Of more than mortal things.

And the Sage answers, "To-day?" Worms of the present perhaps, for indeed a man may make himself a very maggot,—“but what of yesterday?” Has a man no remembrance, no vague suggestion of a past in which he had life before he was on earth? And here we have Tennyson's own experience.

For oft
On me, when boy, there came what then I call'd,
Who knew no books and no philosophies,
In my boy-phrase, "The Passion of the Past,"
The first gray streak of earliest summer dawn,
The last long stripe of waning crimson gloom,
As if the late and early were but one—
A height, a broken grange, a grove, a flower
Had murmurs, "Lost and gone and lost and gone!"
A breath, a whisper—some divine farewell—
Desolate sweetness—far and far away—
What had he loved, what had he lost, the boy?
I know not, and I speak of what has been.

This common feeling, this mystic suggestion of the dreaming soul, has never been more beautifully given.

Some divine farewell,
Desolate sweetness, far and far away,

is perfect in truth and pathos. - The same thought is put, almost as beautifully, in a song published four years after *The Ancient Sage*, and the motive, of it is taken from the lingering sweetness of the words—"far and far away"—upon his ear. Here also Tennyson recalls the boy's celestial dreams of a land known in the dawn of life. I should like to quote it

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all, but I select only the three verses which bear on the question :

What vague world-whisper, mystic pain or joy,
Thro' those three words would haunt him when a boy,
Far—far—away ?

A whisper from his dawn of life ? a breath
From some fair dawn beyond the doors of death
Far—far—away ?

Far, far, how far ? from o'er the gates of Birth,
The faint horizons, all the bounds of earth,
Far—far—away ?

This, felt as a boy, brings about, in such a temperament, and when it recurs in a different way in manhood, the apparent dissolution of all the world of sense, unconsciousness of the body and existence apart from it. We have heard of this already in the *Sir Galahad*. Transports mightier than love lift him above the world of sense. His spirit beats her mortal bars. His very body ceases to be matter :

And, stricken by an angel's hand,
This mortal armour that I wear,
This weight and size, this heart and eyes,
Are touch'd, are turn'd to finest air

The weird seizures of the Prince in *The Princess*, in which he knew not the shadow from the substance ; the visions of Arthur, in which the earth seems not earth, the light and air not light and air, his very hand and foot a dream, lead us up to Tennyson's full and personal expression of this experience in *The Ancient Sage* :

And more, my son ! for more than once when I
Sat all alone, revolving in myself

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The word that is the symbol of myself,
The mortal limit of the Self was loosed,
And past into the Nameless, as a cloud
Melts into heaven. I touch'd my limbs, the limbs
Were strange not mine—and yet no shade of doubt,
But utter clearness, and thro' loss of Self
The gain of such large life as match'd with ours
Were Sun to spark—unshadowable in words,
Themselves but shadows of a shadow-world.

It is the vision, vouchsafed to earth, of what the soul
will be when it returns out of the shadow of sense
into the substance whence it came :

If what we call
The Spirit flash not all at once from out
This shadow into substance.

“This world,” said Novalis, “is not a dream, but
it ought to become one, and perhaps it will.”
And the misery, hardness and folly of earth are,
Tennyson thinks, in the dream, and not in the
reality. We misshape through the senses the
actual world. “My God,” he cries in *The Sisters*,
speaking in the mouth of their father, “I would not
live,”

Save that I think this gross hard-seeming world
Is our misshaping vision of the Powers
Behind the world, that make our griefs our gains.

Death then is the flashing of the soul, out of a life in
which all reality is distorted, into the luminous
straight life out of which it came; the passing from
illusion into reality.

Yet another speculation is connected with this
theory of the soul, and concerns its power of acting
independently of the body. This speculation asks
three questions. First, can the soul of one living in

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the other world speak to the soul of one living on earth, not by voice, but by intensity of thought, driven by intensity of feeling, smiting through space on the thought and feeling of a soul on earth? Secondly, can those on earth communicate in this way with those that have passed away? Thirdly, can two persons both on earth touch one another in this fashion---one soul vibrating, as if through the ether, its message to another soul---across any distance whatever? To all these three questions Tennyson answers yes. *In Memoriam* is full of passages which either maintain or suggest the two first. "The dead shall look me through and through," he cries. "If the grave divide us not, be with me now!"

And he, the Spirit himself, may come
Where all the nerve of sense is numb
Spirit to Spirit, Ghost to Ghost

The soul of his friend in heaven answers his cry for love,

I watch thee from the quiet shore,
Thy spirit up to mine may reach;
But in dear words of human speech
We two communicate no more.

And most of all this is laid down in that full-versed passage, when, rapt by reading the letters of his friend from all the world of sense, the two souls meet, and he is swept into the infinite world:

Till all at once it seem'd at last
* The living soul was flash'd on mine,*

* This is a casual experience on earth, but it will be the normal experience of souls in the world to come. There is a verse in the poem entitled *Happy* which expresses this:

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And mine in this was wound, and whirl'd
About empyreal heights of thought
And came on that which is, and caught
The deep pulsations of the world.

Many other instances occur in the poems. The mother in *Rizpah* hears her son's voice on the wind, calling to her. In the hour of her death he calls so loud that she dies in bliss after her awful sorrow. In *The Ring*, the dead mother makes her child conscious of her presence; the child sees her face; and the husband feels his dead wife impress her will upon him—

The Ghost in Man, the Ghost that once was Man,
But cannot wholly free itself from Man,
Are calling to each other thro' a dawn
Stranger than earth has ever seen; the veil
Is rending, and the Voices of the day
Are heard across the Voices of the dark.

In *The Sisters*, the mystic bond which unites them is not dissolved by death. The love and sorrow of the dead overwhelm the life of the living sister; and the man who loved them both feels them, from the far world, moving always with him. It is the one lovely passage of a poem which is not a great success.

Now in this quiet of declining life
Thro' dreams by night and trances of the day,

This wall of solid flesh that comes between your soul and mine
Will vanish and give place to the beauty that endures,

The beauty that endures on the Spiritual height,
When we shall stand transfigured, like Christ on Hermon hill,
And moving each to music, soul in soul and light in light,
Shall flash thro' one another in a moment as we will.

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The sisters glide about me hand in hand,
Both beautiful alike, nor can I tell
One from the other, no, nor care to tell
One from the other, only know they come,
They smile upon me, till, remembering all
The love they both have borne me, and the love
I bore them both—divided as I am
From either by the stillness of the grave—
I know not which of these I love the most.

The third question asks whether two souls while still on earth may not, in high-wrought states of intense feeling, also touch each other, sometimes clearly, sometimes obscurely. Tennyson thought it possible. In *Enoch Arden*, when Philip asks Annie to marry him, she answers that it is borne in on her that Enoch lives. When she was wed, a footstep seemed to fall on her path, whispers on her ear; she could not bear to be alone, she thought, when she lifted the latch to enter her house, she might see Enoch by the fire—and these mysterious instincts only passed away when she had a child by Philip. They were the passionate thoughts of Enoch from his far-off isle striking on her heart. And on the day of her marriage, Enoch himself heard

Though faintly, merrily, far and far away,

the pealing of his parish bells, and started up shuddering, for then the tragedy of his life was wrought. In fuller statement, *Aylmer's Field* records this belief of Tennyson's. When Edith dies, calling on her lover's name, he hears the cry in London and knows that she is gone:

Star to star vibrates light; may soul to soul
Strike thro' a finer element of her own?

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So speaks the poet, marking the very question which the scientific men in the Psychical Society ask themselves,—Are these touches done through the finer forms of matter, or is that matter spirit?

These were some of Tennyson's speculations concerning the soul. But they all assumed the existence of a great Spirit, and of our souls as a part of Him. As Tennyson grew old, these assumptions were more and more challenged from the side of philosophy and science, and the world in which he lived grew more and more careless of belief in them. One result of this was an assertion of materialism in which God and the soul were alike denied. He met the materialism in a Drama, *The Promise of May*, for which I have no admiration. It seems to make the altogether false assumption that materialism necessarily ends in immorality.

He is more interesting, and says nearly all he wants to say, in the poem of *The Ancient Sage*—a later *Two Voices*—which contains a great number of speculative answers to the assertions of materialism. Their speculative character induces me to call attention to a few of them in this chapter.

The young man who walks with the Sage declares that there is nothing but what the senses tell us. God has never been seen.

"In yourself," the Sage replies, "the Nameless speaks, and you see Him when you send your soul through the boundless heaven." This is Kant's famous phrase put into verse. "If the Spirit," he adds, "should withdraw from all you see and hear, the whole world of sense would vanish."

"Since God never came among us, He cannot be proved."

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"No," answers the Sage; "nothing can be proved. You cannot prove the existence of the world, or of the body or the soul, or of yourself, or of me that speak with you—nor can you disprove these things. Therefore, since you can neither affirm nor deny by reason, cleave to the sunnier side of faith in a Power who makes the summer out of the winter!"

"What Power? The real power is Time, that brings all things to decay."

"There is no such thing as Time. It is relative, not absolute. You cannot argue from its effects. They exist to us, but not to God; and the earth-life and its perishing precede the true life; their darkness is in us, not in reality. It is like the yolk in the egg which breaks out into a new being."

"Ah!" sings the young man, "we are each but as one ripple in a boundless deep. Live, then, only to enjoy, and forget the darkness to which we hasten."

"Yes, but the ripple feels the boundlessness of the deep, and feels itself as at one with its boundless motion. It knows itself alive, and knows that there is a chance, even in the judgment of the understanding, that utter darkness does not close the day. The clouds you see are themselves children of the sun. The light and shadow that you say rule below are mere names. Both are only relative. The Absolute is beyond them both. And, at least, the conclusion to be drawn from our gloom is different from yours—'Eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' Day and night are only counter-terms like border races always at war. You may talk for ever

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in battle about them. One thing, at the end of all speculation, is plain. There is night enough in your city which you can make into light. Do it, and then, before you die, you may see

The high-heaven dawn of more than mortal day
Strike on the Mount of Vision."

Thus the Sage ends his speculations, and we see, in this last advice, the practical moralist emerging from the metaphysical poet who thinks that Time and Space do not really exist; that our life here is illusion in comparison with the true life which underlies the illusive; and that the world of matter in which we move is only what we, in a distorted fashion, perceive of Spirit.

The poem is interesting to compare with *The Two Voices*. It knits together the views of his old age and of his youth, the thoughts of 1842 with those of 1885. But we see in its constant reference to the night and decay which beset mankind how strongly the trouble of the world and of the individual man had now affected him. And he asked himself—If there be a Spirit of whom we form a part and who loves us, if our real self is the soul, and it comes from God and goes to God; if it is thus necessarily immortal—why are we in such trouble? The speculative answer he gives arose out of his reading of Darwin. It is—That our body comes from the brute, and carries the brute with it; that in the body, the soul met with the brute, and had to conquer the brute. In that admixture, the worry and the battle, the confusion and torment of it all, were contained. This battle, repeated in every individual, is repeated also in the whole race. It ended quickly

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enough for the individual, for he was transferred to a higher world, beyond the brutal elements; but it was to reach an end for the whole race with as infinite a slowness as it had been conducted in the past. *Æon* after *æon* was to pass before man, as a whole, would reach his perfection. I think that this latter view, of which I have elsewhere spoken, was a pity; but how is a poet to avoid trouble in his art when he allows himself to be influenced by scientific theories? He is sure to disturb the clearness of his fountain. He ought to keep out of science altogether.

As to the individual, it was different. Why did God link a piece of divine being to a brutal matter? What could be the use of it? In *In Memoriam*, in many poems before and after it, the problem is stated and speculations are made upon it. It was partly done, as we have already seen, that the soul might realise its personality; might, having lived in the body, learn that it had distinct being; and indeed, so far as we know, there is no other way of learning it. But there was something more. This was done in order that the soul might conquer the brute, and having conquered, might know that it could live for ever on a higher plane. When the beast was worked out, then the soul knew itself to be of God, and from God, and belonging to God, for ever. This is put most clearly in that poem entitled, *By an Evolutionist*, where we find Tennyson, at the age of eighty years, telling us not only what he thought, but also to what he had attained. Its personal record is of a profound interest. We hear one of our greatest men, in whom imagination burned to the close of life,

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revealing what he believed God had done for him,
and had given him power to do.

If my body come from brutes, tho' somewhat finer than
their own.

I am heir, and this my kingdom. Shall the royal voice
be mute ?

No, but if the rebel subject seek to drag me from the
throne,

Hold the sceptre, Human Soul, and rule thy Province
of the brute.

I have climb'd to the snows of Age, and I gaze at a field
in the Past,

Where I sank with the body at times in the sloughs of
a low desire,

But I hear no yelp of the beast, and the man is quiet at
last

As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse
of a height that is higher.

So it was with the poet at the close of his long
contention ; and when it comes to that, speculation
is no more, and certainty is hard at hand. The
certainty is expressed even in this very volume of
1885. Yet his well-loved speculation of the Soul
coming out of the Deep and returning to it again
asked once more for recognition, and attained it.

Sunset and evening star,

And one clear call for me !

And may there be no moaning of the bar,

When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,

Too full for sound and foam,

When that which drew from out the boundless deep

Turns again home.

CHAPTER XV

THE NATURE POETRY

"THE love of Nature," the meaning of which term we understand without explanation, has reached its greatest and most various development in the nineteenth century. It had always been a part of an artist's soul among the Aryan families of the earth, but in these last hundred years Nature has risen almost into an equality with humanity as a subject of art. In our own country, Turner, during a long life, shaped into thousands of pictures, drawings and studies, the impressions he received from solitary Nature, and with a passion which, changing its methods year by year, never changed its intensity. And he was only the greatest of a host of painters who have, in solitary love of Nature for her own sake, recorded her doings and her feelings with an intimacy, affection, and joy which have been as eager and as productive in France as in England. The musicians were not apart from this movement. We know from their letters and books that they composed a great number of pieces for the express purpose of recording all they felt in the presence of Nature and when alone with her. The prose-writers of fiction and fancy gave themselves up

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almost too much to natural description ; and many books exist which are nothing more than emotional statements of the profound love of their writers for Nature in her solitudes. The poets were not, of course, behindhand. England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, but chiefly the three first, were driven to express this love of Nature when they were isolated with her as a bridegroom with a bride.

Wordsworth was the first to lift this love of Nature for her own sake into a worship ; and it passed on, receiving no less incense, to Walter Scott and Byron, to Shelley and Keats. It exists, undiminished, in Browning, in Swinburne, and Morris, and in a host of other poets whose names we need not here recall. Each of these had his own special way of feeling the beauty of the natural world, and his own manner of representing it, but the lonely love they all felt was the steady element underneath their individual forms of expression. Tennyson had his own method, and it was different from that of all the others. It differed curiously, and the results to which we are led, when we consider it, are curious.

Mainly speaking, that difference consists in the absence from his mind of any belief or conception of a life in Nature. He described Nature, on the whole, as she was to his senses, as she appeared on the outside. He did it with extraordinary skill, observation, accuracy, and magnificence ; and we are full of delight with this work of his. "I have dwelt on it from poem to poem, and I hope I have succeeded in making clear my full admiration of its power, beauty, variety, and range. But when we have done all this, and think less of particular

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descriptions, and more of the whole impression made by his work on Nature, we are surprised to find that our interest in Tennyson's poetry of natural description is more intellectual than emotional. We ask why, and the answer is—He did not conceive of Nature as alive. He did not love her as a living Being.

Again, when we read his natural descriptions, we find them drenched with humanity. It is impossible, save very rarely, to get away in them from the sorrows or the joys of man. But when we do not meet with humanity in his landscape, the landscape by itself is cold. It rarely has any sentiment of its own. The sentiment in it is imposed upon it by the human soul; so that, at last, we are driven to say: "On the whole, this poet did not care much to be alone with Nature, and did not love her dearly for her own sake. And this is strange; it is unlike any other great poet of this century."

These are the two curious wants in his poetry of Nature, and I believe I can make most clear how he differed from the other poets by describing their position towards Nature in contrast with his own.

I take Wordsworth first. I need not say too much about his view of Nature. I have written of it elsewhere, and many others have also dwelt upon it. But, largely speaking, he believed within his poetic self that Nature was alive in every vein of her; thought, loved, felt, and enjoyed in her own way, not in a way the same as we, but in a similar way, so similar that we could communicate with her and she with us, as one spirit can communicate

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with another. ~~There is a sympathy between us;~~ but there is this difference, that, with few exceptions, she is the giver and we the receiver. Then, what is true of the whole of Nature is true of the parts. Every flower, cloud, bird and beast, every mountain, wood and every tree, every stream, the great sky and the mighty being of the ocean, shared in the life of the whole, and made it, in themselves, a particular life. Each of them enjoyed, felt, loved, thought, in its own fashion and in a different fashion from the rest. Each of them could send its own special life to us men, as well as to one another; could give us sympathy and receive our gratitude. This was no mere dream, it was a reality to Wordsworth. It is not the fancy of a lover of his, gathered from poetic phrases in his work, nor is it an impossible philosophy. No one can say that it may not be true. It cannot be proved, indeed, but it cannot be disproved. He lays it down in clear form at the end of *The Recluse* as a theory which is at the base of all his poetry of Nature and Man. There is a pre-arranged harmony, he says, between man's mind and the natural world which fits them to one another, which enables them to wed one another; and the philosophic ground of this theory is that both Nature and Man, being alike from God, and existing together in God, are capable, when separated from one another in this phenomenal world, of coming together again, and finding themselves to be consciously in a union, one with another, of mutual joy and consolation. This was the philosophic conception in the realm of which he always lived. Imagination took it up, and clothed it with glory and honour, and put into

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it an eager heart of life, so that Nature was his dearest friend, and all its motions in all things his passionate delight. Wherever he went, he had perfect companions, and each of them had something new to say. Wherever he went, he saw all things in an intercommunion, the love of which, being given and received, made the majesty, beauty, and harmony of the universe; and the sight filled him with incommunicable rapture. And this intercommunion was of life with life. In one word, every distinct thing in Nature had a soul of its own. He seems to have gone even further. Every place—with all the separate lives which belonged to its flowers, clouds, stones, lakes, streams, and trees—had, over and above these lives, a collective life of its own. Hence such phrases as “the souls of lonely places.” And, finally, all the souls of these separate places and of all their separate objects, together ran up into the Spirit of the Earth, and then into the One Spirit of the Universe.

Shelley (without Wordsworth's quasi-philosophic ground for his belief) held at root the same idea that Wordsworth held—that all the universe was alive, and that every part of it had its own particular life in the whole. He represented this vast being in the *Asia* of the *Prometheus Unbound*. “Life of life,” He calls her, in the Hymn of all her nymphs. She is the vital Love which makes the life of the Universe. She pervades every part of the animate and the so-called inanimate creation, making in everything a living spirit which lives its own life and loves in its own way; so that every invisible molecule of vapour sucked by the sun

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from ocean or the forest-pool has its own delightful indweller. Practically speaking, this is a view of Nature equivalent to Wordsworth's, only that which Wordsworth conceived as thought evolving in life, Shelley conceived as Love evolving in life.

The love whose smile kindles the universe.
The beauty in which all things live and move.

Shelley then sets man, if he would escape from the darkness of sense, face to face with a living world, whose joy he might see, whose sympathy he might claim, whose life he might share, and whose life was love.

Had Tennyson any conception of this kind held, with certain differences, by these two poets with regard to Nature? Did he conceive of an active life in the natural world and its parts? Does his Nature breathe, enjoy, and love? Can we feel a personal affection for it, or believe that it gives some affection back to us, or that it is, with us, a vital part of a universal love or a universal thought? I do not think, save in a few indefinite touches of fancy, or in an isolated poem like the song of *The Brook*, that we find any principle of this kind conceived by Tennyson or embodied in his Nature-poetry. His natural world is not of itself alive; nor has it anything to do with us of its own accord. It is beautiful and sublime; we can feel for it admiration or awe; but it sends nothing of itself to us. It is the world of the imaginative scientific man, who has an eye for beauty and a heart to feel it. Matter is matter to Tennyson, though no doubt he often thought of

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it as having no absolute existence. But he saw it, when he described it, in its existence to us, and in that relative existence he felt no conscious life in it.

There is, then, in his poetry of Nature an entire absence of that happy union of heart to heart which we feel established between us and Nature when we read the poetry of Wordsworth or Shelley. Tennyson, so far as Nature is concerned, is not our beloved companion in the lonely places of the hills, in the woods, beside the stream, near the great sea, or when we watch the moving sky. We can read him for his records of humanity, for their pathos or their joy; but we do not read him if we wish to escape from humanity and to live with Nature alone. There is no warmth, no life, no love in his Nature. His descriptions of what he sees of the outside of the world are luminous and true, but he does not pierce below the surface of phenomena to a living soul in the universe that enjoys its own life and can send that life to meet our own.

"So much the better," many persons will say. "There is no living soul in Nature. These are the dreams of a certain class of poets, and we welcome Tennyson, who describes things as they are with beauty and with clearness." Well, I have no quarrel with these persons. It is delightful to read Tennyson's natural descriptions, and I have shown in this book that I enjoy, admire, and honour them. I can even endure to be told that he took care, as in that description of the cove at Tintagil, that everything he said wondrously of the waves was yet scientifically true—as if that mattered

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in poetry. All I desire to say is, that this way of looking at and feeling Nature is not the way of the other poets of this century, ~~whose dreams were~~ to them realities, and who loved Nature, not as a picture, which was Tennyson's way, but as a living being.

Again, when we take Coleridge, we are also in contact with a theory which gave a life to Nature, so that we could feel in it a spirit which answered to our own. Nature was not, in his poetry, separate from us, as Wordsworth and Shelley held; Nature *was* ourselves. The apparent world was but the image of our own thoughts. But those thoughts, and therefore the apparent world, were part of the life of the great Spirit. In Him we and the universe were both alive.

O the one life within us and abroad
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul !

We give, that is, its life to the universe. What answers from it to us is life, but it is our own. When we are dull and dead of heart we get nothing back :

I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

And then occurs this famous passage in which what he thinks is so clear that to read it is to understand :

O Lady ! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live ;
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud !
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,

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Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless, ever-anxious crowd,
Ah ! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element !

* * * * *

Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud—
We in ourselves rejoice !
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.

It is plain from these lines that Nature lived to Coleridge because he lived. The universe breathed with our being, and we loved in it the Life of God which was in ourselves. Coleridge never, then, describes Nature from the outside, as if it were a mere picture.

Had Tennyson any notion of this kind with regard to the natural world? Now and again he seems to approach it, but he does not grasp it as a faith. In his poem, *The Higher Pantheism*, he thinks of the universe as a Vision. But the vision is distorted, imperfect, and out of gear, because we are distorted, imperfect, out of gear. If we could get right and straight, that which we perceive would seem perfect, as it really is. For "That vision—is it not He?" This dim distorted theory—as contorted in itself as it makes the universe of Nature be to us—might be brought into some relation to the theory of Coleridge, but it is better to pass it by, as Tennyson practically did. It had no direct influence over his natural description. It leaves his Nature lifeless.

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This theory would not, perhaps, have left Nature lifeless to him, if he could have fully believed it. But he left it as a suggestion. It was a question he addressed to us and the universe—"This vision—is it not He?" and to this question he had no clear answer to give. There *is* something, he thought, below the appearance of Nature, but what it is we can only guess; and it may be something absolutely different from what we perceive the universe to be, or what we imagine to underlie our perception of it. He believes that the life of God is there, but what we see and feel in Nature tells us nothing true about that life. We only see that distorted image of it which is mirrored by our imperfection. Hence, even when Tennyson wrote about Nature within this quasi-pantheistic theory, he could not feel any love for her, nor attribute any life to her, because she was only a false picture of the true world. But he could describe what he perceived; and he chose out of all he perceived that which he thought beautiful, and drew it as it was to the senses, not to the soul; as lifeless matter, not as living spirit.

There is another little poem concerning this supersensuous, unattainable secret which is hidden below phenomena, and which is contained in full in every separate part of the whole:

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but *if* I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

Yes, I daresay; but this sceptical position of mind

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towards Nature, this demand to understand, prevented him, as a poet, from feeling any soul in the universe. He spoke of things only as he saw them. He said, I repeat, exactly what the scientific man, with an eye for beauty, would wish to be said about Nature. The descriptions then are vivid, accurate, lovely on the outside, but cold. They have no voice of love or comfort for the heart of man. When I say this, I apply it only to his descriptions of Nature apart from humanity, of Nature by herself. When he mingles up human life with Nature, then his descriptions of her seem warm. But it is the human sentiment transferred to Nature which warms her. By herself, in the poetry of Tennyson, she remains without any sympathy of her own for us.

I turn now to Walter Scott and Byron, and contrast them as Nature-poets with Tennyson. Neither of them had any of these half-philosophic views of Nature, but they had a lively delight in the natural world for its own sake and in isolation from humanity. They could spend hour after hour alone in the wild land, thankful that man did not intrude upon them, and satisfied to the heart with the beauty of solitary Nature. In the midst of his story of *The Lady of the Lake* or of *Rokeby*, Scott rejoices to sever himself from his human tale, and to describe for his own special pleasure the islands of Loch Katrine and the narrow pass which led to them, or the glens of the Greta and the Tees, as if there was nothing else in all the world for which he cared.

Byron has the same solitary pleasure in Nature, the same love of her for her own sake, apart from

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man. It is the only joy left to Manfred, who spends hours alone among the icy splendours of the Alps, and loves to talk with the witch of the torrent when he most hates to talk with man. Byron rejoices everywhere in his poetry to lose humanity in Nature. The verse I quote from *Childe Harold* paints this part of his poetic life :

To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell,
To slowly trace the forest's shady scene,
Where things that own not man's dominion dwell,
And mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been ;
To climb the trackless mountain all unseen,
With the wild flock that never needs a fold ;
Alone o'er steeps and foaming falls to lean—
This is not solitude, 'tis but to hold
Converse with Nature's charms, and view her stores
unroll'd.

There is none of this lonely joy in Nature in the poetry of Tennyson. Man—other men, or himself—always intrudes. Some friend steps in, some human event that has been in the place, some human passion which the scene illustrates. Tennyson must have his man. He is half afraid to be with Nature alone ; at least he has no satisfaction till he can people his solitude. I scarcely remember a single description of Nature for her own sake, and alone, in Tennyson ; and this also divides him from all the other poets of this century. We lose, then, in him that which we still love—solitary communion with Nature away from humanity. That deliverance from our trouble, and the world's, is not supplied to us by our poet. We are kept close to the weariness of being always with mankind. I do not say it is not good for us : no doubt it is. But for all that, we, who desire a holiday at times from the

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vast disorder and sorrow of human life, fall back with a sigh of pleasure on Wordsworth or Scott, on Shelley, or even on Byron; and live alone with Nature.

As to Keats, he has no theory of one universal Thought or Love pervading Nature with life, like Wordsworth or Shelley, but he does delight (and especially in his first poems before *Endymion*) in Nature for her own solitary sake, like Scott or Byron. He sits down in a lonely place and paints it piece by piece with the most observant joy, and neither his own humanity nor that of others disturbs the scene. But he also has a view with regard to Nature which goes beyond that of Byron or Walter Scott, and which, though it is quite unlike that of Wordsworth or Shelley, has this in common with their view—that it bestows an actual life on Nature. He borrows his belief from the Greek mythology. The Greek did not say that the stream was alive, or the tree—but he did say that a living being, Naiad or Nymph, lived in the stream or in the tree, and was bound up with them. This was re-introduced into English poetry by Keats, and it lifted his Nature out of death into life. The whole material world, at every part of it, was peopled by living beings who spoke to us out of the waves of the sea, and the trees of the wood, and the flowers of the hills, out of the mountains and the streams. The beauty and glory of the universe was the beauty and glory of life. Hence he had a more intimate sense of loveliness in Nature than either Scott or Byron, and a simpler sense of her life than either Shelley or Wordsworth. And this life was sympathetic with our

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life. These living beings could communicate with us ; they had something of humanity in them ; but without our sense of sin and without our weariness. Even of this kind of life in Nature Tennyson has nothing. He does not even deviate into it in the classical poems. He has not even Plato's tolerance for these pretty myths, nor his appreciation of their charm. A tree is a tree to him, a flower a flower, and nothing more. They are so and so, he says, and he describes them as lovely forms of matter, or of what seems so to us. He tells beautifully how they seem to his eyes, with great and delightful power, but that is all he does ; and we desire something more, something which will leave us "less forlorn" in Nature. We want to touch life and feel it replying to our life,

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

This is the main statement, and it seems to me true. Individual lines or short passages might be brought forward from which we might infer that he now and then touched some view which thought of a living Nature. But this is only momentary, and he drifts within a few pages into another view, and then into another view. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Keats, Shelley had each of them one clear conception of Nature ; and all the natural description of each was influenced and ruled by the special view held by each of them. Tennyson wavered from view to view. Sometimes he seems to hold that God is full master of the universe. Then he slips in another place into the view that Nature may be partly in the hands of an evil power

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and its cruel will. Sometimes he seems to think that Nature is the image our distorted perceptions make of a divine order and beauty which may be spiritual, or may be material; sometimes that she is the form Thought takes to us, and therefore immaterial; sometimes that she is nothing but matter, nothing more than the scientific materialist declares her to be. But none of these views are fixed; no single one of them is chosen and believed. They run in and out of one another. He wavers incessantly, like the pure sceptic, and the result is that all he says about Nature by herself makes no unity of impression upon thought.

What *is* fixed, what is clear, what does emerge in his poetry, after all these philosophic views have been played with, is Nature as she appears to the senses, the material world in all its variety, beauty, and sublimity, seen as it is on the outside. "Let me tell," he thinks, "beautifully and truly the facts. I see nothing certainly but forms, and these I will describe." And these he does describe, with an accuracy unparalleled by any other English poet, and with a wonderful beauty and finish of words.

This is the influence of his scientific reading upon him, or rather of the scientific trend of thought during the years in which he wrote his chief poems. His Nature-poetry was materialised; it never suggests a life in Nature; and it is probably owing to his not feeling anything in Nature which spoke to him—soul to soul—that he did not, after his earlier poems, ever appear to love Nature for her own sake, or care to live with her alone. By herself, she was not sufficient for him. In fact, I do not think that I am exaggerating when I say

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that the Nature-poetry of this century, which was founded either on the conception of a life in Nature, or on enjoyment of her beauty and sublimity for her own sake alone, without any admixture of humanity, is not at all represented in Tennyson. Its decay in him makes his position in the history of the modern poetry of Nature of great interest. Moreover, that he naturally took a line on this matter of Nature which was new, and which on the whole harmonised with a time given up to the scientific view of the outward world, marks out, not only his keen individuality, but his original genius.

Of course this says that there is no sentiment in Tennyson's description of Nature—and this is true when he is describing Nature alone, as she is in herself. It is not true when he introduces humanity into the scene. Then he groups Nature round the feelings of men and women, and the human sentiment is reflected on the physical world. Or he takes Nature up into the life and heart of man, and, in illustrating man by nature, colours Nature by human feeling; or he composes a Nature in harmony with his own moods and those of his personages, and this composed Nature is really humanity. In all these ways Nature is made full of sentiment. And the work he has thus done on her is most lovely, far lovelier than his painting, beautiful as it is, of natural things by themselves in lucid words and with exquisite care. But the whole body of sentiment which then flows through the natural world is human; and only human. It is associated with the landscape. It does not come out of Nature herself—as it would have done in

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the writings of Wordsworth or Scott, of Byron or Shelley or Keats.

That distinctiveness, however, makes us only the more eager to feel the humanised Nature of Tennyson, and to get from it the pleasure that it gives. It is a different kind of pleasure from that given to us by the other poets in regard of Nature; or rather, the kind of beauty which gives that pleasure was more fully wrought out by Tennyson than by any of the others. We are charmed, then, by his Nature-poetry when it is humanised, or when we wish to remember ourselves in the midst of Nature. But when we wish to get rid of humanity and to get rid of self-consciousness, to touch a Soul in Nature, to feel her life beat on our life, to love her for herself alone, in her solitudes—we find nothing in Tennyson to help us. We are forced back by his Nature-poetry either into human life, or into the world of mere phenomena.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LATER POEMS

It is not an infrequent habit of an artist to try over again in old age the kinds of work which pleased his youth. This is his way of re-living the days when he was young. Other men do this in the silence of memory. The artist does it in work; and I may gather within this simple framework the greater number of those later poems of Tennyson which reach a high excellence or have a special quality. He reverted to his classical, romantic, and theological interests. He felt over again the poetic sentiment of friendship which was a characteristic mark of his youthful poetry, but he felt it with a natural difference. He felt over again in memory, and reproduced, also with the natural difference, the imaginative ardour of a youth for Nature and love,

When all the secret of the Spring
Moves in the chambers of the blood

And, lastly, he returned, and with extraordinary force, in *Merlin and the Gleam*, to that pursuit of the ideal perfection, of the undiscovered land, which in ancient times he had expressed in the *Ulysses*.

First, then, with regard to his interest in classic subjects and the classical poets, he felt again the

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impulse which long ago produced *Enone* and *Tithonus*, and shaped it now into *The Death of Enone*, and, perhaps, into *Demeter and Persephone*. I have already treated of those poems, and need not touch them again. But something yet remains to be said, in general terms, about his imitations and translations of the classic poets, and of the affection and the praise he gave them. These great masters of idea and form, that is, of intellect and beauty, were his daily companions.

The elements derived from this life-long association with the Greek and Roman poets appear in his earliest poems and move like leaven through the whole of his work. They add to the dignity of his poetry; they bring to it a clear, reflective grace; often an old-world charm, as when some pure classic phrase carries with it suddenly into an English poem a breath, an odour of Pagan loveliness. He derives from them a sculpturesque manner in verse which often reminds me of the limbs and of the drapery of the figures in the Elgin marbles; and to their influence are due his desire and his power to see clearly and to describe with lucid accuracy things as they appear, both in human life and in nature, and to trust to this for his effects, rather than to any pathetic fallacies. These, and other qualities naturally accordant with them, were not created in him by the classics but were educated, even awakened, in him by them. The curious thing which I seem to detect in his writings, and which is quite in harmony with his unmingled English nature, is that he is much more in sympathy with Latin than with Greek poets, much more at one with the genius of Rome than of Athens.

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That tendency to over-conciseness, which in his dramas often reaches baldness, may have its root in an admiration of the Latin brevity of phrase. But the Latin language, as a vehicle of expression, did not lose soft grace or suggestion of ornament in the concise phrase. The English language, on the contrary, owing probably to the loss of its inflections, demands more expansion than the Latin, and when its poetic phrases are pared down to the brevity of Latin, they tend to become too austere, too abrupt, too squat, for poetry. Such conciseness does not afford room enough for pleasurable and fitting ornament; the imagination cannot indulge in delightful play or colour. Beauty does not live and change from point to point of the compressed verse, nor thrill along its movement.

Tennyson indeed was not without these sweet graces. His early work, as well as *In Memoriam*, *Maud*, *The Princess*, and his lyrics, is rich with tender ornament. I only wish to say that he tended to reduce his ornament too much, as other poets tend to increase it too much. And he sometimes grew cold and naked, so that on the whole we may say of him that he has less of ornament and imaginative play and soft changes than the other poets of this century. Nearly all his dramatic work, for example, has this rigidity, this want of versatility and phantasy and self-delight.

When Tennyson wrote in this fashion, his verse resembles Norman architecture in a village church. It has power, it often fits the subject well, and there is a certain beauty in it; but it would have had as much power, as much fitness, and far more beauty, had it resembled the Gothic of the thirteenth century,

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and been more interesting from verse to verse with lovely ornament, with freer and more gracious invention of detail. This tendency to austerity, to a certain rudeness or a certain over-fineness, (the two things often go together,) to wide spaces devoid of ornament, is partly due, I think, to his fondness for Latin forms. The Greeks did not suffer from this over-polish, this beating down of impulse, this educated severity, and necessarily this want of freedom. Tennyson would have been at all points an even greater poet than he was if he had loved Greece more and Rome less. The natural liberty, the bold invention, the swift following of native impulse within well-defined but wide limits of law, the fearlessness which felt that beauty was always right, all of which marked Greek poetry, were not as fully Tennyson's as they might have been. He frequently pulled too hard at the reins he fitted on Pegasus, and that soaring creature was a little too much subdued to the *manège*. His art was more Roman than Greek.

The influence of Homer is felt throughout his heroic poetry, but he missed the rush of Homer's verse, its easy strength and freedom. He gained in his poetry a great deal of the Homeric simplicity, sonorousness, and tenderness, but he did not gain all he might of the variety, naturalness, and the constant entertainment which Homer brings to us from line to line. Moreover, that extraordinary flexibility to the world of man which belonged to Homer, a flexibility to every type of humanity as great as that of the air to the varied surface of the earth, was only partly possessed by Tennyson. In fact, the time in which he lived had too much

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of culture and too little of nature to enable him to attain this excellence fully.

He twice tried to translate Homer—two celebrated passages in the *Iliad*—and both seem to me to prove the un-Homeric nature of his art. They resemble failures more than successes, and are even less good than might have been made by poets very much his inferiors. Perhaps a great poet is specially ill-fitted (owing to his naturally strong individuality) for translating another great poet. But even granting that, these translations are overcarefully wrought, their art is too self-conscious, they have no gallop in them, and the sentiment of the original has evaporated. So strong is the Tennysonian style, that Homer is changed into Tennyson. Some of this failure is owing to the vehicle he chose. Of all forms of possible English verse, blank verse is the least fitted to represent the Homeric hexameter. It wants especially that shout of the long syllable of the final dactyl which above everything else gives its leap and cry and force to the Homeric line, and sends it rushing to its close like the steeds of Achilles to battle.

These Homeric translations were the only translations he ever published. But he did try to reproduce some of the classic metres in English, and succeeded as well as others, so far as the metres are concerned, and better than others, so far as the usage of words is concerned. The poem written in alcaics to Milton is a beautiful, brilliant, sound-changing, and harmonic thing. But it is English in note. Tennyson never imitated; in all he did he was English and himself. Though he

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loved, as I said, the Latin conciseness, he never wrote in the manner of the Latin poets. The literary movement of *Lucretius*, though the poem is Roman in feeling to the backbone, is English, as it ought to be, not Lucretian.

Again, Virgil had more influence over him than Homer; we feel the power and the delicacy of this master in Tennyson's poetry, not in imitation, but as a controlling influence towards soft precision of phrase; but had he tried to translate Virgil he would have entirely failed. There was a rude Anglo-Saxon element in him which Virgil could not have endured, and which would have, in spite of every care, burst out of his character into such a translation, and lowered the Virgilian grace. It may have been owing to that native roughness that he admired Virgil so much. In these later poems he wrote the praise of Virgil for the Mantuans, a homage he did not pay to Homer. Old age had increased his enjoyment of a poet he had loved when a boy. The varied kinds of Virgil's work, his subtle excellences, even his twofold relation to humanity, are expressed with a beauty and truth the critics might envy.

All the charm of all the Muses
often flowering in a lonely word

fully enshrines what the happy fanatic of Virgil rejoices to have said for him. "I that loved thee," he cries, "since my day began

Wielder of the stateliest measure
ever moulded by the lips of man.

"Stateliest measure" says, it seems, too much, and

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so does "ocean-roll of rhythm." Virgil's verse is not the stateliest, and the roll of ocean is stronger than his rhythm; but if the phrases suggest that Tennyson lost some of his judgment in admiration, we like him the more because of that. The praise also that he gives is expressed with that full mouth of song which is so rare in an old man's work. A line like this that I quote is like summer itself in the golden age—

Summers of the snakeless meadow,
unlaborious earth and oarless sea

Nor are these lines less noble which tell of the everlasting power of Virgil, whose imperial verse shall live when empires are like the phantoms through whom Æneas went, bearing the branch of gold :

Light among the vanish'd ages ;
star that gildest yet this phantom shore ;
Golden branch amid the shadows,
kings and realms that pass to rise no more.

Then, too, Catullus, as well as Virgil, engaged his heart. He had endeavoured in time past after the metre Catullus used to the despair of his peers—"so fantastical is the dainty metre." But now, in his old age, he passed from the metre to the spirit of that poet, and felt over again, and with his own tenderness, and in the lovely place where the Latin singer sometimes dwelt, the softly-raining tenderness of Catullus for those he loved. *Frater Ave atque Vale*, he cried among the olive terraces of Sirmione. For these, then, for Virgil, Catullus, even for Lucretius, he was more fit comrade than for Homer. Art cultivated into that which is a little

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more over-refined than Nature was more to him than the art which itself is Nature.

Next, Tennyson not only reverted to these classical subjects; he also reclaimed his pleasure in Romance. Old age, though it cannot act romance, lives all the more fully with it in the chambers of the heart. Its stories, its sentiment, far outside of the daily world with which the sage has long been weary, enchant the soul even more than in early youth. It is one of the worst misfortunes of an artist's old age, that his hand can no more express in sculpture or in painting, and his brain no more shape in music or in poetry, all the beauty which he feels. It were better perhaps that he left the shaping aside, and were content with thoughts alone and their emotions. But it is hard not to try, and Tennyson tried in *The Falcon* a tale of Boccaccio, and in *The Foresters* the woodland legend of Robin Hood. Both dramas are quite unworthy of his hand; and when Oberon, Titania, and their fairies enter the groves we hear how sadly they have deteriorated since the days of Theseus. Shakespeare's Oberon and Titania are royal personages, and, though Mustard, Pease-blossom, and the rest make their own jokes on Bottom, they would have sooner died than have called Oberon "Ob.," or Titania "Tit." This is the humour of *The Spinster's Sweet-arts* imposed on Fairyland, and it is incredibly clumsy.

Driven by the same feeling for Romance, he had already written in the volume of 1880 on an Irish tale, seeking all too late that plenteous fountain of imaginative work. *The Voyage of Maeldune* is a fine piece of scenic power, written with extraordinary

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vigour and in racing rhythm, but it has no soul, and is stripped clean of the Celtic charm and of the Celtic pathos. Tennyson loses all the sentiment of the original by imposing on the voyagers his own conception of the Irish character. The warriors who sail boast loudly of their descent; the slightest thing flusters them with anger; they shout, and hate, and wallow in flowers and tear them up in a blind passion, and gorge, and madden, and chant the glories of Finn, and fight with one another, and slay, till only a tithe of them return. This is the English form which he gave to the story—the English pleasure in rough-and-tumble killing for amusement, the Anglo-Saxon *brutalité* imposed upon the Irish nature. Did it seem to him quite impossible that sixty comrades should sail together and be excited by various adventures, without falling out furiously with one another? There is not a trace of this in the original. All are faithful, loving, and tender comrades. Not one of them acts like a drunken sailor at a Portsmouth fair. There is no boasting, no fighting, and no slaying. They all return in safety, save three, who did not belong to the band. A gentle air of half-religious, half-romantic sentiment fills the tale: and a little indignation, mixed with a little amusement, belongs to the reader who finds the sorrowful romance of the story lost in the English rudeness.

Indeed, all his life long, Tennyson, though he did love the Welsh tale of Arthur, never felt, or was capable of feeling, the Celtic spirit. He felt something which he thought was it, but it was not. The Celtic magic which Arnold traced in

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English poetry was in another world than Tennyson's. Other poets have the Celtic strain in their blood, and it passes into their song, but Tennyson is the unmixed English type. He is the poetic flowering of pure Anglo-Saxonism, the very best it could do alone; and a noble, fair, and splendid flower it is. But he would have climbed to a higher ledge of Parnassus if he had been baptised in the Celtic waters. As it was, he was only English, and the statement accounts for many things, both good and bad, in his poetry, on which I need not dwell. It accounts, among the rest, for the Anglicising of Arthur's character and of his tale. A man with a grain of the Celtic nature in him could never have written the *Idylls of the King* as Tennyson has written it.

Again, he reverted to his old theological interests. I have already shown how full he became of the question of Immortality. The nobly composed poem of *Vastness* is written to enforce a conclusion of the truth of that doctrine. *Despair*, the terrible pathos of which he need not have lessened by an intrusion of his own personal wrath with those who believed in everlasting death or in everlasting hell, is a powerful plea for the immortality a God of Love would naturally secure for man. His poems to friends, and on the death of friends, are all touched with eternal hopes, with his constant cry—Life and Love are not worth living and loving unless they continue, and only in their continuance is the problem of earth's trouble solved. *The Ancient Sage*, as we have seen, took up again this question, and others related to it—the questions of *The Two Voices*, of *In Memoriam*.

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Another poem of his, *St. Telemachus*, recurred to the same theological motive which he treated in his attack on asceticism in the *Idylls of the King* and *St. Simeon Stylites*. Let the anchorite, it says, no longer live his deedless life. Better be stoned to death in the Forum, and slay a vile custom, than pray and fast, with life, in the wilderness! Fine things are in it—Rome flaring lurid, in the hermit's imagination, at every western sunset, and calling him forth to act; the description of the crowd pressing to the Coliseum, and of Telemachus borne along by that full stream of men,

Like some old wreck on some indrawing wave.

I do not know if this poem belong truly to his old age, but it has not the mighty grip with which Tennyson would have seized on such a subject in his youth and manhood.

In the very last volume, this return to his early theological interests continues. *Akbar's Dream* records how, in the poet's mind, all religious differences were merged into one religion of goodness and love; nor does the poem want phrases of force and breadth. A gentle air, a kindly quiet, as of one who already felt the soft sunlight of a higher peace than ours, broods over all the late religious poems.

There is yet another matter, in which an old man reverts to his youth; and this is the emotional sentiment of friendship. Mature manhood has not less of friendship than youth, but it has little time to cherish its sentiment. In youth it is different. We have then time to hover over a friendship, to prophesy about it, to take it with us for inward

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pleasure, or, if we have lost our friend, for sorrow of contemplation. *In Memoriam* is full of that contemplative emotion, and Tennyson was young when he began to write it. The poem entitled *To J. S.*, beautiful throughout with a soft steadiness of chastened thought, and loveliest at its close, is also written in the air of this youthful sentiment, but it is mingled with a wisdom rare in youth.

A later kind of friendship, that of a man who has realised life and finds his affection deepen for his friend, not through imaginative feeling, but through interchange of character with him, and through their interest in humanity, breathes in the poem *To the Rev. F. D. Maurice*; as good in its gay contented way as Milton's sonnets to Lawrence and to Cyriack Skinner, the note of which, in a different form of verse, it emulates. But the earlier sentiment still lives at times. It is not spread now over the whole of life, but arises for a brief period in lonely hours, and only for the dead. There are two poems — *In the Gard'n at Swainston* and *In the Valley of Caunteretz*—which touch the depths of manhood's friendship in regret.

When age comes, there is a further change. The sentiment of friendship is now like that felt in youth, but the waters from which it arises are different, and its horizon is also different. The work of life is over, and emotion, as in the days of youth, has again time to feel itself. Moreover, the sadness of decay, though it be not allowed to master the soul, yet brings an autumn mist over the landscape of life, in which all thoughts are mellowed, and lays on all its words a lovely colouring, with the beauty of which the old man is

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charmed, with which he plays, but which he knows is beauty that is departing. What we thus feel for ourselves, we feel also for our friends who have grown old with us. They, too, are in their Indian summer, and year by year the final frost, touching one or another of them, warns us of our own death. We cannot look forward to an enjoyment of their friendship as we did when we were young; but those who believe, like Tennyson, in a life to come, think of friendship renewed in a world where life is winterless.

These various emotions are a new source of poetic impulse which, in regard of friendship, is almost more productive of poetry than its sentiment in youth. Thousands of poems have been written in their atmosphere, and a collection of them—for they have a special quality and a unity of emotion—would be of abiding interest and pleasure. Some recover a little of the gaiety of youth; others have a trembling pleasure, such as a tree all gold and crimson might have in its own loveliness, with the knowledge in its pleasure that the coming night may send the storm to strip it bare. But if the poet be a person of an equal mind, such poems have a courageous air, a kindly tolerance, a wisdom inwoven with love, a gratitude to life for all its joy, even for the strength of its sorrows; and often a delightful brightness as of a veteran who has kept his shield in all his battles, and who waits peacefully for the last calling of the roll.

Many such poems, chiefly of Dedication, occur in the later volumes of Tennyson. They ought to be read together when we desire to feel his grace

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and power in this special kind of poetry, which no one, I think, has ever done so well. They are revelations of character, and of a character made braver and kindlier by old age. No trace of cynicism deforms them, and their little sadness is balanced by a soft and sunny clearness, by tenderness in memory and magnanimity of hope. Each of them is also tinged with the individuality of the person to whom it was written. The poems to Edward Fitzgerald, to his brother, to Mary Boyle, to Lord Dufferin, possess these qualities, and are drenched, as it were, with the dew of this delicate sentiment peculiar to old age. They look backward, therefore, but they also look forward; and not only friends on earth, but those who have found their life in death, enter into their hour of prospect and of retrospect.

When the dumb Hour, clothed in black,
Brings the Dreams about my bed,
Call me not so often back,
Silent Voices of the dead,
Towards the lowland ways behind me,
And the sunlight that is gone!
Call me rather, silent voices,
Forward to the starry track
Glimmering up the heights beyond me
On, and always on!

The Silent Voices.

Again, correlative with the sentiment which inspires these poems, there is another kind of poetry which is naturally written in old age, and recurs to those motives of youth which arise out of the happiness of the world and of the poet in the awakening of life in Spring. This poetry is born out of the memories of that early joy, and is also

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touched with a distinctive sentiment, native only to old age, delicately clear, having a breath of the colour and warmth of youth, and flushed with the hope of its re-awakening. Its poems are like those February days which enter from time to time into the wintry world, so genial in their misty sunlight that the earth seems then to breathe like a sleeping woman and her bosom to heave with a dream of coming pleasure. They recall the past, and prophesy the immortal, Spring. Old age often feels this sentiment, but is rarely able to shape it; but when, by good fortune, it can be shaped, the poem has a unique charm. Of such poems *The Throstle* is one, and *Early Spring* is another. They may have been originally conceived, or even written, in earlier days, but I am sure that they were rewritten in old age, and in its evening air.

Lastly, there are the poems and those portions of poems which are inflamed with the spirit that pursues after the perfection of beauty. Of these *Merlin and the Gleam* is the best. It is this spirit in his work, as it is in the work of all great artists, which gives Tennyson his greatest power over the heart of humanity; and, though I have dwelt on it at the beginning of this book, I cannot do better than dwell upon it at the end, but in a closer connection with his poetry. To quote all the passages which illustrate this temper of his would occupy too large a space; but a long selection might be made of them, until we come to the later poems in which this enkindling aspiration burns with as clear a flame as in the days of his youth. It is even more ethereal, of a more subtle spirit.

Tennyson was never content with the visible

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and the material, never enslaved by that which our world calls the practical. He never believed that the things of sense were other than illusions, which dimly represented or distorted the true substance of beauty that lay beyond the senses. His life, like every faithful artist's life, was, therefore, in cessant pursuit. The true device of the artist, as it is of the religious man in religion, is this: "While we look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are not seen and eternal;" and what the visible world said or offered to Tennyson, however now and then he was disturbed by the temporary and material, was in reality nothing to him. It had no influence upon his work. "Brothers, I count not myself to have attained, but I press forward," is also as much a device of the artist as it is of the saint. Both, in their several spheres, write that motto on their soul. And Tennyson never found finality in his art, never had any satisfaction, save for the moment of completion, in the outward form he gave to his subject.

It is the Idea after which the artist runs. The moment one form of it is realised, it opens out something more to be pursued, and when that is seized, it discloses, in its turn, another island on the far horizon to which he is bound to sail:

Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.

To linger in the attainable is the death of art "Be perfect in love," said Jesus, "as your Father in heaven is perfect in love." Be perfect in beauty, he would say to the artist, as your Father

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in heaven is perfect in beauty. And indeed, in a wider world than ours, the two sayings are one. for Beauty is the form of Love. At this point, that word of Blake's is true: "Christianity is Art, and Art is Christianity." Nor in this view is humanity neglected, for whom the poet writes and the painter paints. For, since to love beauty is as ultimate an end for man as to love goodness and to love truth, the life of the artist is necessarily lived for mankind. There is no higher life in all the world, nor one more difficult and tempted. But the greatness of the strife is tempered by the beauty and glory of the ideal world in which the Maker lives, the light of which is not of the sun or moon or stars, but of the central source,

pure ethereal stream,
Whose fountain who shall tell!

Tennyson had long since embodied his view of this world beyond the world we see, in which thought and feeling follow the ineffable and infinite, in his poem entitled *The Voice and the Peak*. All night the voices of the ocean and the waters of the earth cried to the silent peak; and the poet asks, "Hast thou no voice, O Peak?" All the voices, it answers, rise and die, and I, too, shall fall and pass; and the earth below me feels the desire of the deep and falls into it, and is no more. The outward world vanishes away. Then the poet replies: There is another world above the senses that dies not, the world of the invisible thought of man—

The Peak is high and flush'd
At his highest with sunrise fire;
The Peak is high, and the stars are high,
And the thought of a man is higher.

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A deep below the deep,
And a height beyond the height !
Our hearing is not hearing,
And our seeing is not sight.

What is one to do who lives in this world above the visible, where he sees the uncreated light ? What but to leave all the material, and follow the far-off vision ? Some there are, said Tennyson in *The Two Voices* fifty years ago :

Who, rowing hard against the stream,
Saw distant gates of Eden gleam,
And did not dream it was a dream.

Later on, he threw the passion of this spiritual pursuit into a different form in *The Voyage*; painting this aspiration in those that feel it with too much lightness of character, as if it were only a gay love of youth ; but yet who never turn aside from it—the happy tribe who know not the unremitting strife, the serious passion, or the awful vision of the unapproachable loveliness, which are the badge and the burden of the great artists.

For one fair Vision ever fled
Down the waste waters day and night,
And still we follow'd where she led,
In hope to gain upon her flight.
Her face was evermore unseen,
And fixt upon the far sea-line ;
And each man murmur'd, " O my Queen,
I follow till I make thee mine."

But with Tennyson it was a far graver matter, He was, even to his death, the follower of the mightier vision, of the supernal gleam. This is the subject of a poem which appears in these volumes of his old age—*Merlin and the Gleam* ;

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as lovely in form and rhythm and imagination as it is noble in thought and emotion. It speaks to all poetic hearts in England; it tells them of his coming death. It then recalls his past, his youth, his manhood; his early poems, his critics, his central labour on Arthur's tale; and we see through its verse clear into the inmost chamber of his heart. What sits there upon the throne; what has always sat thereon? It is the undying longing and search after the ideal light, the mother-passion of all the supreme artists of the world. "I am Merlin, who follow The Gleam."

I know no poem of Tennyson's which more takes my heart with magic and beauty; but that is a personal feeling, not a critical judgment. Yet how lovely, how pathetic, and how noble on the old man's lips is the beginning:

O young Mariner,
You from the haven
Under the sea-cliff,
You that are watching
The gray Magician
With eyes of wonder,
I am Merlin,
And *I am dying,*
I am Merlin,
Who follow The Gleam.

Verse by verse we company with the poet flying forward to the Gleam. To pursue it is the love of life; to die in its pursuit is joy, for beyond death its glory shines. Therefore now, on the verge of death, he gives his last message to the young, calling on them to follow, as he has done, the light that was never reached, but never failed:

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And so to the land's
Last limit I came—
And can no longer,
But die rejoicing,
For thro' the Magic
Of Him the Mighty,
Who taught me in childhood,
There on the border
Of boundless Ocean,
And all but in Heaven
Hovers The Gleam.

Not of the sunlight,
Not of moonlight,
Not of the starlight !
O young Mariner,
Down to the haven,
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,
And crowd your canvas,
And, ere it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow The Gleam.

Who would not wish to have written that? Who would not wish to have so lived as to be able to leave that last impulse to the young, to cry in death that prophet-cry? It is a cry all the more forcible on his lips because, with all this passion for the ideal, he kept so close to the actual life of men, clinging as intimately to the common thoughts and feelings of his time, so far as his range permitted, as the grass to the varied surface of the earth. But dear as the real was to him, the ideal was dearer still.

These then are the things I have tried to say of his work in old age. And now, having walked so long with a great poet, it is hard to part from

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him. We have lived in a large and varied world, with its own landscape and its own indwellers ; no transient world, reflecting as in a bubble of air the passions and follies, the tendencies and the knowledge of the hour, but a solid sphere built slowly during a lifetime into form. Forty years of creation were given to make this new country of the imagination, which men will visit, and in which they will wander with pleasure, while humanity endures. Every one who in the centuries to come shall spend therein his leisure will leave it and return to his daily work, consoled and cheered, more wise and more loving, less weary and heavy-laden, nearer to beauty and to rightcousness, more inspired and more exalted. The permanence of the work of Tennyson is secure. Few are his failures, many his successes ; and I trust that this study of him will make men who love him love him more, and those who do not yet love him find that constant pleasure.

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